

# THE RESURGENCE OF CLASS CONFLICT IN WESTERN EUROPE SINCE 1968

VOLUME 2

Comparative Analyses

*Edited by*

COLIN CROUCH

and

ALESSANDRO PIZZORNO



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I. Crouch, Colin II. Pizzorno, Alessandro

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TO THE MEMORY OF SERGE MALLET



# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xv
<i>Notes on the Contributors</i>	xix
1 New Forms of Industrial Conflict 1960–1974 <i>Pierre Dubois</i>	i
2 Occupational Structure, Collective Organisation and Industrial Militancy <i>Richard Hyman</i>	35
3 Women and Immigrants: Marginal Workers? <i>Thierry Baudouin, Michèle Collin and Danièle Guillerm</i>	71
4 The Effects of Recent Changes in Industrial Conflict on the Internal Politics of Trade Unions: Britain and Germany <i>Roderick Martin</i>	101
5 Centralisation and Decentralisation as Tendencies of Union Organisational and Bargaining Policy <i>Rainer Zöll</i>	127
6 New Demands or the Demands of New Groups? Three Case Studies <i>Beindt Kirchlechner</i>	161
7 The Relationship between Trade Union Action and Political Parties <i>Rainer Deppe, Richard Herding and Dietrich Hoss</i>	177
8 The Changing Role of the State in Industrial Relations in Western Europe <i>Colin Crouch</i>	197
9 Strike Waves and Wage Explosions, 1968–1970: An Economic Interpretation <i>David Soskice</i>	221
10 Urban Protest in Western Europe <i>Eddie Cherki, Dominique Mehl and Anne Marie Metallé</i>	247
11 Political Exchange and Collective Identity in Industrial Conflict <i>Alessandro Pizzorno</i>	277
<i>Bibliography</i>	299
<i>Subject Index</i>	319
<i>Name Index</i>	330



# Preface

The origins and development of the project of which this book and its companion are the main fruits have been set out by Alessandro Pizzorno in his preface to the first volume (*The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe since 1968: National Studies*). In that book we described, in the context of a particular set of themes and questions, the different national experiences of the countries covered by our project (Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and West Germany). We turn now to comparative analysis, drawing on the empirical material established in the previous volume in order to illuminate issues relevant to several or all of our countries.

The discussions in our group during the period that we held our seminars (1974 and 1975) did not enable us to reach a unity of views on interpretations and explanations of the phenomena under consideration, and no one of us is necessarily committed to the analysis presented in the other papers. The discerning reader will detect these underlying differences, while on occasion precise points of disagreement are made explicit in the text. However, in the course of discussion and through criticism of each other's early drafts we have managed to reduce the range of disagreements and to gain from the encounter with other national or intellectual traditions. Hopefully there is evidence of this in our final product. More important, we have achieved something close to unity concerning the themes of continuing relevance to our subject. All the papers address themselves to a common set of problematics, even if not all of them have each element of this set within their brief.

A point of importance is, as noted by Pizzorno in the preface to Volume 1, the significant shift which took place in our perspective during the course of the project. The phenomenon that initially inspired formation of the project was that of increased shop-floor militancy, associated with the decentralisation of working-class action and the prominence of 'new' sections of that class. By the end our focus had moved to the state, its relations with the central organisations of capital and labour, and to macroeconomic variables at national and international level. In part this change can be related to external events. In the years immediately following 1968 the most notable events were those at the level of the plant and the largely spontaneous actions among workers, women, students, immigrants and urban protest groups, which surprised those who had spent years studying the social quiescence of the 1950s and early 1960s. But later the major changes in the position of the

state and central institutions, together with the growing crisis of the Western economy, seemed to be indicating important developments in the social structure of advanced capitalist societies that were themselves of major interest to sociology.

However, although in part the changes at the level of state and macro-economy can be seen as 'reactions' to an earlier popular 'spontaneity', this has proved to be a considerable oversimplification, as several of our papers show. In several respects changes at the wider level can, from our present vantage point, be seen as preceding and possibly causing the lower-level activity. In the case of both levels the thesis of institutionalised conflict which had been developed in the preceding period seemed in need of re-evaluation, and this provided a common analytical focus. A series of interrelated changes was occurring, and it was possibly the more dramatic nature of the lower-level eruption (particularly in France and Italy) which had led to the initial preoccupation with it. Having identified a 'crisis of institutionalised conflict', the question was raised whether we should regard that period as historically 'transcended' by one of renewed conflictuality, or whether something resembling a cyclical process was at work, leading us to look for tendencies of re-institutionalisation.

To the extent that, whatever stabilisation processes may or may not succeed, there has been some kind of rupture with the immediate past, the evidence of our two volumes suggests that, somewhere around 1968, Western Europe reached the end of the 'post-war period'. Springing directly from the Second World War itself, all these countries had embarked on a period of economic reconstruction in which technology (boosted initially by the war), Keynesian economic policies and major changes in the pattern of world trade gave a new lease of life to a reformed capitalism. Economic growth based on mass consumption provided constantly expanding horizons which reduced the intensity of distributional conflicts and enabled a capitalist economy to coexist for the first time in history with full employment, freely organised labour and a wide range of effective and virtually universal civil liberties.

The facility with which growth was achieved could not last indefinitely and, at varying times in different countries but largely from the mid-1960s onwards, its pursuit required internal constraints and pressures of various kinds; and as growth began to decline, so distributional conflicts acquired an intensity which had become unfamiliar. This did not mean that there was a simple return to patterns characteristic of the pre-war years; too much had changed for that. The state, its fiscal activities and the organisations of labour and capital all occupied a new position within the political economy. Workers had established new positions of local strength as a result of several years of full employment, rising real earnings and civil freedoms; new groups of workers had emerged, partly as a consequence of the technical changes of the post-war expansion and partly as a consequence of the massive demand for labour from new sources generated by that expansion (women, immigrants from rural areas and immigrants from non-industrial and former colonial territories). In many cases these groups owed little to the established ideologies, unions and

political parties which had been developed by earlier generations of working-class struggle. At the same time conflicts within other areas of life where capitalist prosperity had left major lacunae (e.g. the quality of working-class urban life) became starker.

The period in which we now live is one in which groups and institutions at all levels and interests are adjusting to these changes, and in the process developing new social structures, solidarities and contradictions. At the end of our project this process was by no means complete, and it is likely that we shall be rapidly overtaken by events. However, it is neither possible nor proper for social science to await some perhaps unattainable new state of stability before attempting to make sense of the times, and in fact it is often in the midst of change that people are able to judge accurately what is taking place. It is therefore in that spirit that we offer these papers as a contribution to the on-going study of an important social process.

## THE PAPERS

The initial paper, by Pierre Dubois, is primarily concerned with the apparently new forms of industrial conflict which attracted much attention from the outset of the resurgence. However, as he moves on from there to consider the background and implications of the new forms, Dubois reviews most of the themes that constitute the remainder of the book: the identities of the groups of worker concerned, the relation between shop-floor and official union organisation, the role of political parties, the state and economic variables, the relationship with extra-industrial conflict and the whole process of de-institutionalisation and re-institutionalisation. As such his paper provides a valuable introduction to the volume.

Essential background to the study of changes in conflict is provided by the two succeeding papers, which consider the changing composition of the working class and its possible implications. Richard Hyman reviews developments in overall occupational structure, while Baudouin, Collin and Guillermin consider two groups on which much discussion has focused: women and immigrants.

Developments at shop-floor level, particularly as they affect relations between union organisation and shop-floor activists, were a central initial concern of the project, and two papers are devoted to this theme. Both tackle it through a comparative analysis of two countries: one in which shop-floor autonomy and militancy has been generally low (Germany) and the other in which it has, in different ways, been significant: Roderick Martin considers Britain and Rainer Zoll Italy. After these papers on changing class composition and union – activist relations we have included a short paper by Berndt Kirchlechner that, in the course of three case studies, illustrates the significance of many of the themes considered by the other authors.

The remaining papers all, but in different ways, turn attention from the immediate shop-floor and union network to consider the ramifications of industrial conflict within the wider social structure. Deppe, Herding and Hoss

examine the implications for a set of institutions closely bound up with the union movement: working-class political parties. This leads naturally to consideration of the position of the state, the institution which has come increasingly to bear the strain of contradictions of the society which can no longer be contained within a rule-governed system of industrial relations. This is the focus of my own paper.

Consideration of the causes and consequences of industrial unrest cannot proceed far without attention to economic processes. In his paper on this theme David Soskice goes beyond analysis of the background economic variables to relate economic developments closely to the particular issues which are the concern of several of the other papers.

Urban protest of various kinds was a feature of the resurgence of class conflict which seems at times to be closely linked with developments in employment relations and at others to be an entirely autonomous process, even if certain background causes are related. This therefore provides a further important extra-industrial area to which a project of this kind must give attention, and some of the other papers draw attention to the significance of events at this level. Cherki, Mehl and Metallé provide a comprehensive review of developments in all six of our countries and go on to suggest explanatory variables.

Finally, the same set of themes established in Dubois's paper, and taken up in detail by the others, are integrated into a specific theoretical and interpretive framework by Pizzorno: changes in the pattern and level of conflict; within and outside industry in the identity of sections of the working class; in the balance between official unions and shop-floor autonomy; in state, polity and tripartite organisation; in inflation and economy; and most of all the interaction between overall historical progression and cycle-like processes of institutional development.

COLIN CROUCH

*April 1977*

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We are also indebted to the Warden, Fellows and administrative staff of Nuffield College, Oxford, for providing the base and administrative services for the project and for facilitating our work in many ways. Special thanks are due to Miss Eunice Berry, who did the great bulk of the secretarial work.

Those attending our main seminars included several participants not among the authors of the papers, and our first seminar, at Oxford, was in particular attended by a group of trade union officers. All these people have, through their contributions to discussion, helped shape our work, and their names are listed below. (Designations are those applicable at the time of the seminars, and in some cases have since changed.)

Tony Banks, head of research, AUEW (Engineering Section), London  
Maurice Chaumont, Centre pour l'Analyse du Changement Social,  
Université de Louvain

Ferruccio Clavara, CSC, Brussels

Alessandro Conte, Istituto di Studi Economici e Sociali, Università degli  
Studi di Urbino

Christel Eckart, Institut für Sozialforschung, Frankfurt am Main

Angel Enciso, FGTB, Brussels

Robert Fraisse, CORDES, Commissariat Général du Plan, Paris

Gino Giugni, Università degli Studi di Roma

John Goldthorpe, Nuffield College, Oxford

Alain Guillermin, Laboratoire de Sociologie de la Connaissance, Université  
de Paris VIII

Ursula Jaerisch, Institut für Sozialforschung, Frankfurt am Main

Walter Kendall, Centre for Contemporary European Studies, University  
of Sussex

Nele Löw-Beer, FRG, IG Metall, Frankfurt am Main

Jean Magniadas, Centre Confédéral d'Etudes Economiques et Sociales,  
CGT, Paris

Roberto Massari, Groupe de Sociologie du Travail, Université de Paris  
VII

Uwe Neumann, SOFI, Göttingen

Michael Schumann, SOFI, Göttingen  
Alain Touraine, Centre d'Etudes des Mouvements Sociaux, Paris  
Bruno Trentin, FIOM-CGIL, Rome  
Paul Vercauteren, Centre pour l'Analyse du Changement Social,  
Université de Louvain

The papers in this volume originally written in languages other than English were translated by:

Dubois: Eddy Slack and Colin Crouch  
Baudouin *et al.*: Eddy Slack  
Zoll: Sue Wilcox  
Kirchlechner: Charles Sable  
Deppe *et al.*: Sue Wilcox  
Cherki *et al.*: Eddy Slack

# *List of Abbreviations*

ACADI	Association des Cadres Dirigeants de l'Industrie pour le Progrès Social et Economique (France) [Association of Industrial Managerial Staffs for Social & Economic Progress].
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union (UK) [now AUEW, q. v.]
AFL – CIO	American Federation of Labour – Congress of Industrial Organisations (USA)
ARAU	Atelier de Recherche Architectural et Urbanistique (Belgium) [Workshop for Architectural and Urban Research]
ASLEF	Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (UK)
ASTMS	Association of Supervisory, Technical and Managerial Staffs (UK)
ASW	Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers (UK)
AUBTW	Amalgamated Union of Building Trades Workers (UK)
AUEW	Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (UK)
Betr. VG	Betriebsverfassungsgesetz (Germany) [Works Council Law]
BOAC	British Overseas Airways Corporation (UK)
BRB	British Railways Board (UK)
BRD	Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Federal Republic of Germany)
CDU – CSU	Christliche-Demokratische Union – Christliche Soziale Union (Germany) [Christian Democratic Union – Christian Social Union]
CFDT	Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail [French Democratic Confederation of Labour]
CFTC	Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens [French Confederation of Christian Workers]
CGIL	Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro [General Italian Confederation of Labour]
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail (France) [General Confederation of Labour]
CISL	Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori [Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions]

CNL	Confédération Nationale du Logement (France) [National Confederation of Tenants]
CNPF	Confédération Nationale du Patronat Française [National Confederation of French Employers]
CP	Communist Party (UK)
CSC	Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens (Belgium) [Confederation of Christian Trade Unions]
CUB	Comitato Unitario dei Base (Italy) [rank-and-file committee]
DATA	Draughtsmen and Allied Technicians Association (UK) [now TASS, q. v]
DC	Democrazia Christiana (Italy) [Christian Democratic (Party)]
DGB	Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund [German Federation of Trade Unions]
DKP	Deutsche Kommunistische Partei [German Communist Party]
EEC	European Economic Community
ETU	Electrical Trades Union (UK)
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei (Germany) [Free Democratic Party]
FGTB	Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique [General Federation of Belgian Labour]
FIM – CISL	Federazione Italiana Metalmeccanici-CISL [Italian Engineering (workers') Federation, affiliated to CISL]
FIOM – CGIL	Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgia-CGIL (Italy) [Federation of Metal Workers, affiliated to CGIL]
FO	Force Ouvrière (France) [Workers' Force]
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GMWU	General and Municipal Workers Union (UK)
GOG	Gewerkschaftsoppositionelle Gruppe (Germany) [opposition group within a trade union]
GRIF	Groupe de Recherches et d'Informations Féministes (Belgium) [Feminist Research and Information Group]
IACP	Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari (Italy)
IG Bau	Industriegewerkschaft Bau-Stein-Erde (Germany) [Building and Allied Industries Trade Union]
IG Chemie	Industriegewerkschaft Chemie-Papier-Keramik (Germany) [Chemicals, Paper and Ceramics Industries Trade Union]
IG Metall	Industriegewerkschaft Metall (Germany) [Metal Industry Trade Union]
ILO	International Labour Office

IMSF	Institut für Marxistische Studien und Forschung (Germany) [Institute for Marxist Studies and Research]
ISSOCO	Istituto per lo Studio della Società Contemporanea (Italy) [Institute for the Study of Contemporary Society]
ITU	International Typographical Union (USA)
KDP	Kommunistische Demokratische Partei (Germany) [Democratic Communist Party (Maoist)]
MTA	Mouvement des Travailleurs Arabes (France) [Arab Workers' Movement]
NALGO	National and Local Government Officers Association (UK)
NAS	Nucleo Aziendale del Sindacato (Italy) [Union factory cell (UIL)]
NASD	National Association of Stevedores and Dockers (UK)
NGA	National Graphical Association (UK)
NUBE	National Union of Bank Employees (UK)
NUGMW	National Union of General and Municipal Workers (UK) [now GMWU, q. v.]
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers (UK)
NUPE	National Union of Public Employees (UK)
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen (UK)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OP	Ouvrier Professionnel (France) [skilled worker]
OS	Ouvrier Spécialisé (France) [semi-skilled worker]
ÖTV	Gewerkschaft Öffentliche Dienste, Transport und Verkehr (Germany) (Trade Union for the Public Services, Transport and Communications)
PCF	Partie Communiste Française [French Communist Party]
PCI	Partito Comunista Italiano [Italian Communist Party]
PDUP	Partito Democratico di Unità Proletaria (Italy) [Democratic Party of Proletarian Unity]
PiF	Professionnel 1 Fabrication (France) (a skill grading)
POEU	Post Office Engineering Union (UK)
PSIUP	Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria [Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity]
PSU	Partie Socialiste Unifiée (France) [Unified Socialist Party]
PvdA	Partie van der Arbeid (Netherlands) [Labour Party]
RGO	'Revolutionäre Gewerkschaftsopposition' (Germany) ['Revolutionary Union Opposition' (radical broadsheet)]
SAS	Sezione Aziendale Sindacale (Italy) [union factory

	section (CISL)]
SDS	Sozialistische Deutsche Studenten [Socialist German Students]
SER	Sociaal Economische Raad (Netherlands) [Social-Economic Council]
SNCF	Société Nationale du Chemin de Fer (France) [National Railway Company]
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland [Social-Democratic Party of Germany]
SSA	Sezione Sindacale di Azienda (Italy) [union factory section (CGIL)]
SUNIA	Sindacato Unitario Nazionale di Inquilini e Assegnatari (Italy) [National Union of Public and Private Tenants]
TASS	Technical and Supervisory Section [of AUEW, q. v.] (UK)
TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union (UK)
TUC	Trades Union Congress (UK)
UAW	United Automobile Workers (USA)
UCS	Upper Clyde Shipbuilders [company] (UK)
UIL	Unione Italiana dei lavoratori [Italian Union of Labour]
UILM	Unione Italiana Lavoratori Metalmeccanici [Union of Italian Engineering Workers, affiliated to UIL]
UK	United Kingdom
UNIA	Unione Nazionale di Inquilini e Assegnatari (Italy) [now SUNIA, q. v.]
UPW	Union of Post Office Workers (UK)
US(A)	United States (of America)
USDAW	Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (UK)
VW	Volkswagen [company] (Germany)
WWA	'Wir Wollen Alles!' (Germany) ['We Want Everything!' (radical broadsheet)]

## Notes on the Contributors

Thierry Baudouin is engaged in teaching and research with the Laboratoire de Sociologie de la Connaissance at the Université de Paris (Vincennes).

Eddy Cherki carries out research on urban protest movements with the Centre d'Etude des Mouvements Sociaux at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris.

Michèle Collin is engaged in teaching and research with the Laboratoire de Sociologie de la Connaissance at the Université de Paris (Vincennes).

Colin Crouch, D. Phil. Born 1944; lecturer in sociology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Publications include: *The Student Revolt*, 1970; (editor, with L. Lindberg *et al.*, *Stress and Contradiction in Modern Capitalism*, 1975; *Class Conflict and the Industrial Relations Crisis*, 1977; and various articles on class, politics, industrial conflict and education. Author of several Fabian Society pamphlets and chairman of the Fabian Society, 1976.

Rainer Deppe is a research sociologist with the Institut für Sozialforschung at Frankfurt-am-Main. He has published 'Industrielle Akkumulation und landwirtschaftliche Entwicklung in China' (in *Handbuch 2 – Politische Ökonomie, Geschichte und Kritik*, 1975) and 'Gewerkschaftliche Organisation und politische Orientierung der Arbeiterschaft' (with Herding and Hoss), in Rolf Ebbinghausen (ed.), *Bürgerlicher Staat und Politische Legitimation*, 1976. He is now completing a project, *Sozialdemokratie und Klasseninteressen* (with Herding and Hoss), to be published in 1977.

Pierre Dubois, doctorat en sociologie. Born 1944; engaged in research with the CNRS Groupe de Sociologie du Travail, Université de Paris VII. Principal publications: *Recours Ouvrier, Evolution Technique, Conjoncture Sociale*, 1971; (with C. Durand and S. Erbès-Seguin), *Grèves Revendicatives ou Grèves Politiques?*, 1971; *Mort de l'Etat-Patron*, 1974; (with C. Durand), *La Grève*, 1975; *La Sabotage dans l'Industrie*, 1976. Currently engaged in research into the division of labour in mass-production enterprises and workers' reactions to it.

Danièle Guillerm is engaged in teaching and research with the Laboratoire de Sociologie de la Connaissance at the Université de Paris (Vincennes).

Richard Herding is a research sociologist with the Institut für Sozialforschung at Frankfurt, West Germany. He has published *Job Control and Union Structure: a study on plant-level industrial conflict in the United States with a comparative perspective on West Germany*, 1972; *Soziale Ungleichheit und materielle Ansprüche* (with Eckart, Jaerisch, Japp, and Kirchlechner), 2 vols, 1974; 'Klassenzusammensetzung, Ökonomische Entwicklung und Arbeiterbewusstsein', in *Gesellschaft* 4, 1975 (also with Eckart *et al.*) and 'Gewerkschaftliche Organisation und politische Orientierung der Arbeiterschaft' (with Deppe and Hoss), in Rolf Ebbinghausen (ed.), *Bürgerlicher Staat und politische Legitimation*, 1976. He is now completing a project, *Sozialdemokratie und Klasseninteressen* (also with Deppe and Hoss), to be published in 1977. He contributes to *Autonomie: Materialien gegen die Fabrikgesellschaft*.

Dietrich Hoss is a research sociologist with the Institut für Sozialforschung at Frankfurt-am-Main. He has published *Die Krise des 'institutionalisierten Klassenkampfes': Metallarbeiterstreik in Baden-Württemberg*, 1974; and 'Gewerkschaftliche Organisation und politische Orientierung der Arbeiterschaft' (with Deppe and Herding), in Rolf Ebbinghausen (ed.), *Bürgerlicher Staat und politische Legitimation*, 1976. He is now completing a project *Sozialdemokratie und Klasseninteressen* (also with Deppe and Herding), to be published in 1977.

Richard Hyman, Senior Lecturer in Industrial Relations, University of Warwick. Main publications: *The Workers' Union*, 1971; *Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism*, 1972; *Strikes*, 1973; *Social Values and Industrial Relations*, 1975; *Industrial Relations: a Marxist Introduction*, 1975. Current work: constraints and influences on trade union policy in Britain between the wars; inequality and trade union policy in Western Europe; developments in collective bargaining, job control and 'participation' in current British industrial relations.

Berndt Kirchlechner studied psychology and sociology at the Universities of Freiburg, Cologne and Giessen. Since 1970 at the Institut für Sozialforschung, Frankfurt-am-Main, engaged in projects on the training and professional position of nursing staff, workers' consciousness of social inequality, strikes in Western Europe, etc. Publications include: *Krankenschwestern in der Ausbildung* (with M. Pinding, J. Thomae), 1972; *Berufssituation und Mobilität in der Krankenpflege* (with M. Pinding and J. Munstermann), 1975; *Soziale Ungleichheit und Materielle Interessen* (with C. Eckart, R. Herding, U. Jaerisch, K. Japp), 1974; *Arbeiterbewusstsein, Klassenzusammensetzung und ökonomische Entwicklung* (with Eckart *et al.*), 1975; *Gewerkschaftliches Bewusstsein von Arbeitern* (with C. Eckart, R. Herding, U. Jaerisch), 1974 (will appear in English in *German Political Science*, Vol.II).

Roderick Martin, fellow in politics and sociology, Trinity College, Oxford, and faculty lecturer in sociology. Main publications include *Communism and the British Trade Unions 1924-33*, 1969; *Redundancy and Paternalistic Capitalism*

(with R. H. Fryer), 1974; *The Sociology of Power*, 1977; various papers on union politics. Currently working on industrial relations in the national newspaper industry, especially computerisation; and on the social consequences of redundancy generally.

Dominique Mehl works with the Centre d'Etude des Mouvements Sociaux at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris.

Anne-Marie Metaillé works with the Centre d'Etudes des Mouvements Sociaux at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris.

Alessandro Pizzorno, Professor of Sociology, Università degli Studi di Milano. Previously taught at the Universities of Urbino, Harvard, Tehran and Oxford. Publications include *Comunità e Razionalizzazione*; (edited) *Political Sociology*; (edited) *Operaie e Sindacati in Italia 1968-1972* (six volumes).

David Soskice, fellow in economics at University College, Oxford. Currently engaged in research on an international study of workers' militancy and inflation with Lloyd Ulmann of the University of California (Berkeley).

Rainer Zoll, professor at the Universität Bremen, engaged in studies of trade unions. Previously worked as press spokesman for IG Metall. Publications include: *Der Doppelcharakter der Gewerkschaften*, 1976; 'Gewerkschaftliches Bewusstsein und politisches Bewusstsein' in *Sviluppo Economico e Rivoluzione*, 1969; various articles in such journals as *Les Temps Modernes*, *Ulisse*, *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, *Partisans*. Currently concluding a research project on the 1974 strikes in the Lower Weser metal industry.



# I *New Forms of Industrial Conflict*

PIERRE DUBOIS

This paper tries to give an account of the radicalisation of forms of conflict which took place in five countries (Belgium, France, Italy, the United Kingdom and West Germany) in the late 1960s and early 1970s, before the consequences of the energy crisis and the economic recession which marked 1974 and 1975. (The economic context has been considerably changed by these recent developments, and as yet it is too early to draw conclusions on changes in the pattern of industrial conflict.) The radicalisation was manifested in a series of interdependent phenomena: waves of strikes, strikes at all levels, a relative increase in the length of conflicts, increasing control exercised by the mass of workers, developments in forms of action, and increasing recourse to direct action. The first part of the paper establishes the facts: the analysis is descriptive, comparative and historical. In the second part some interpretation is attempted. First, the incidence of economic variables, both conjunctural and structural, is considered: in what economic conjunctures do strike waves occur? What are the implications for strikes of technical rationalisation and the emergence of new groups of workers? Second, the question of institutionalisation is tackled. It is suggested that the first strike waves were the direct consequence of insufficient institutionalisation at the lowest level, that of the enterprise. The strikes led in turn to attempts at reinforcing institutionalisation which contained the seeds of their own negation: there was thus a double movement—of institutionalisation and of growing radicalisation.

## THE EXTENSION OF STRUGGLES: THEIR CONTROL AND FORMS: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

### THE EXTENSION OF STRUGGLES

By whatever indicator one chooses (numbers of strikes, numbers of workers involved, numbers of 'days lost') there was more strike activity at the end of the 1960s than at the beginning (see Table 1.1). The task here is to go beyond the measurement of this and assess the extension of the renewed conflictuality,

temporally and spatially: was the strike movement continuous or discontinuous? At what geographical and occupational levels did it take place? How large were the strikes? How long did they last? To what extent can one deduce an evolutionary development from these points during the past decade? A detailed account of the strike waves will be found in the companion volume to the present work, and the main statistical outline is contained in the graphs there for individual countries and in the paper by M. Shalev.<sup>1</sup>

TABLE 1.1 *Growth of strikes in Western Europe (annual averages)*

	<i>Number of conflicts</i>	<i>Workers involved (thousands)</i>	<i>Days lost (thousands)</i>
Belgium			
a: 1958-69	55	35	331
b: 1970-73	176	82	965
rise b/a	224%	130%	191%
France			
a: 1958-67	1,753	1,979	2,484
b: 1968-73	?	3,483 (est)	26,000 (est)
c: 1969-73	3,467	2,180	3,204
rise b/a	?	76%	946%
rise c/a	97%	10%	29%
Italy			
a: 1958-68	3,000	2,680	10,500
b: 1969-73	4,615	6,830	22,550
rise b/a	53%	155%	115%
United Kingdom			
a: 1958-67	2,368	1,082	3,274
b: 1968-73	2,648	1,690	11,190
rise b/a	12%	56%	242%
West Germany			
a: 1958-68	340	86	340
b: 1969-73	?	204	1,099
rise b/a	?	136%	223%

*Note:* These figures are not comparable from one country to another, even after account is taken of the different sizes of the active population. There are differences in the definitions of 'conflict', 'workers involved' and 'days lost'. One can compare only tendencies.

From these it is possible to discern four phases in the development of a strike wave: first, a period of relatively weak conflict; second, a premonitory period in which certain aspects of conflict begin to increase; third, conflict rises to its maximum level; fourth, a period of decline which is only relative (conflict remains at a higher level than in phase one). Such a pattern can be found in all the countries, though with occasional exceptions.

Strikes may next be classified according to level: the *interprofessionnel*<sup>2</sup> (national or regional); the *professionnel* (affecting a branch or sector of economic activity, at national or regional level); and that of the enterprise (ranging from the workshop to all establishments of the same firm - differences which may themselves be significant). It has frequently been asserted that the recent strike waves have been predominantly factory-level movements. While, for most of the time, the movements have started at this level, this has not always been the level at which they have ended.

France and Italy are the only two countries which have known *interprofessionnel* strikes of any consequence. In France, the strike wave of May-June 1968 was different from the more extended movements of 1971-3. The strikes started in the factories, virtually reached a solution at the *interprofessionnel* level (*Protocole d'Accord de Grenelle*), and were then transformed into sectoral strikes in the negotiation of collective agreements. The movement at last ended in factory-level strikes as workers sought to go beyond the agreements and secure further improvements from individual employers. The pattern of 1971-3 was more characteristic of the French situation: a mass of factory-level strikes often prolonging sectoral actions of very limited duration (usually 24 hours). Both regionally and nationally, brief *interprofessionnel* strikes developed from these actions,<sup>3</sup> raising more universal demands (retirement, minimum wage, employment, the cost of living, social security).

There was also a growth in brief *interprofessionnel* strikes for social reforms in Italy.<sup>4</sup> The demands covered a wider field than in France, broaching issues of housing and transport policy. The 'hot autumn' of 1969, which marked the start of the phase of high conflict, was really a case of a movement at sectoral level finding expression in factory-level strikes. Strikes at branch level have an importance in Italy far greater than in France.

Strikes at the *interprofessionnel* level in the UK have a completely different significance from France and Italy, being purely defensive measures raising no demands for reforms. The only recent examples have been: the protest strikes against the Industrial Relations Bill (1970 and 1971); the threat of a general strike over the imprisonment of a group of dock-workers for offences against the Industrial Relations Act in 1972; and a one-day strike in 1973 over the reintroduction of statutory incomes policy. The increase in strike activity in the UK has primarily taken place at enterprise level or in monopolistic sectors where one or two firms dominate an industry (including the public sector). Two major exceptions to this pattern are the strikes in the engineering and building industries, though British strike statistics do not make possible estimate of the precise importance of the different levels.

In neither Germany nor Belgium have the unions called national *interprofessionnel* strikes in recent years, though there was in Germany in 1972 the wave of 'unofficial' strikes in defence of the Social-Democratic Government. German strikes occur predominantly at factory level and at sectoral level within individual regions (*Länder*). In Belgium, only strikes at factory level are of importance. In a development not unlike that in France in 1968, the Belgian factory-level strikes of 1970 culminated in national tripartite action (unlike France, the tripartite conference saw the end of the strike wave).

*The size of strikes:* By average size one means the average number of people

TABLE 1.2 *Evolution of the average annual size of strikes, according to periods and countries (workers involved in each strike)\**

<i>Previous period (10 years)</i>	<i>Period of preparation</i>	<i>Period of high conflict</i>	<i>Period of relative decline</i>	<i>New period of high conflict</i>
<b>Belgium</b>				
59-68: 720	69: 410	70: 730 71: 530	72: 340 73: ?	—
<b>France</b>				
57-66: 640	67: 1,680	68: ?	69: 650 70: 350	71: 740 72: 840 73: 620
<b>Italy</b>				
58-67: 800	68: 1,500	69: 2,000 70: 900 71: 900 72: 1,800 73: ?	—	—
<b>United Kingdom</b>				
58-67: 450	68: 950 69: 530	70: 460 71: 530 72: 690	73: 500	
<b>West Germany</b>				
57-66: 370	67: 80†	69: 1,010	70: ? 72: ?	71: ? 73: ?

\* The averages are not comparable between countries given the different definitions of 'strike' and 'workers involved'. It is therefore possible to compare only the pattern of evolution, within one country or from one to another.

† 1968 was a period of relative decline in Germany (average size 640).

Source: OECD and national statistics.

affected by a strike (both strikers and those laid off in consequence of it). It is often argued, especially in France, that the average size of strikes is tending to increase. Obviously, such an argument needs also to take into account developments in the level of strike activity as discussed above. When one takes into account both the rise in factory-level strikes and the rise in strikes at higher levels which has occurred in some countries, it might be expected that the two tendencies would counterbalance each other, leaving no overall change. The figures shown in Table 1.2 seem to support this argument, though it must be stressed that changes within and differences between the systems of definition used in the various countries limit the extent to which one may draw firm conclusions, especially comparative ones. (Details of many of these variations are given by Shalev, *op. cit.*)

*The length of strikes:* The recent strike waves have confounded the prevailing hypothesis that over a long period the average length of strikes has been declining. Details are given in Table 1.3. In Italy 1969 and 1970 (the beginning of the period of high conflict) saw an increase in the length of strikes which was not maintained consistently in the following three years. As will be seen below, this has to do with changes in the forms of action. In Germany the situation is curiously similar to that in Italy, though for different reasons. In certain years of high conflict the average length increased, while in others it diminished. In France, 1968 saw an average length of two weeks, which is considerably longer than usual; in other years the figures indicate extreme stability. The picture in Belgium and the UK is clear: in the course of the strike waves the length of strikes increased considerably and remained at a high level during the subsequent relative decline in strike activity.

Just as one can discern a differentiated development in the length of strikes depending on whether it is a phase of high conflict or of relative decline, there is also a relationship between length and level. In the countries where factory-level disputes predominate (the UK and Belgium) the average length is greater than elsewhere, even when due allowance is made for difference in the statistics. Inversely, the countries experiencing *interprofessionnel* strikes (France, Italy) have a much lower average length. Germany is a case apart, experiencing sectoral strikes of extremely variable length.

*The control of strikes:* Who decides that a strike should take place? Who controls its development? Who ends it? The most favoured current hypothesis is that the recent strike waves have been largely spontaneous. However, to speak of growing spontaneity implies an absence of organisation, opposition to the union apparatus, and a movement which develops without orders from the union outside the factory. It is more accurate to speak of a growing role of the mass of workers involved in the control of disputes. This process has not been uniform across all the countries, but evidence of its occurrence is traced in all the national reports in the companion volume to the present work. In France there was in 1968 the establishment of *assemblées ouvrières* and *comités de grève*, replacing the unions' channels of mobilisation, though in only a minority of cases were the unions opposed to the action. In the approach to the

TABLE 1.3 *Evolution of the average annual length of strikes, according to periods and countries (numbers of days)\**

<i>Previous period (10 years)</i>	<i>Period of preparation</i>	<i>Period of high conflict</i>	<i>Period of relative decline</i>	<i>New period of high conflict</i>
<b>Belgium</b>				
59-68: 8.4	69: 6.5	70: 13.2 71: 14.2	72: 5.2 73: 16.3	
<b>France</b>				
57-66: 1.2	67: 1.4	68: 15 (est)	69: 1.5 70: 1.5	71: 1.4 72: 1.3 73: 1.6
<b>Italy</b>				
58-67: 4.3	68: 1.9	69: 5.0 70: 5.6 71: 2.6 72: 2.1 73: 2.1		
<b>United Kingdom</b>				
58-67: 3.0	68: 2.0 69: 4.1	70: 6.0 71: 11.4 72: 13.7	73: 4.7	
<b>West Germany</b>				
57-66: 3.8	67: 6.5†	69: 2.8	70: 0.5 72: 2.8	71: 8.3 73: 3.0

\* Average length is not strictly comparable between countries given the different bases of calculation of workers involved. It is possible to compare only the pattern of evolution, within one country or from one to another. Length is here calculated on the basis of annual statistics. It is important to note that monthly differences in the course of the same year are often extremely important (ranging, for example, from 1 to 14 in France and from 1 to 8 in Britain).

† 1968 was a period of relative decline in Germany (average length: 1.0).

Sources: OECD and national statistics.

subsequent Parliamentary elections the unions gradually regained control, urging workers to end their strikes for the sake of the elections, and in the following months there was an incessant debate over democracy in the course of struggles. Subsequent developments have shown that the situation varies with the level of action. The unions have the initiative in the higher-level disputes, though when they call workers together to support an action it often becomes the occasion for workers to press their own specific demands. Strikes at factory level give workers more chance to take control, though the unions frequently work alongside them in their actions. In general, since 1968

control of factory-level conflicts has been shared between the union's organisation in the factory and the assembly of workers, working sometimes in agreement, sometimes in hostility and sometimes through a balance of power.

In Italy, developments initially similar to those in France became institutionalised after the phase of high conflict: the *delegati* and assemblies of workers were officially recognised by the unions. In spring 1969 the unions organised factory referenda which decided on strikes. In later developments the *delegati* and *comitati di base* were recognised in several agreements, and the right of workers to hold meetings was legally recognised in 1970 in the *Statuto dei Lavoratori*. The previous structures of representation fell into desuetude. After 1970 began a new phase in the system of control over strikes. At the national *interprofessionnel* level (in the campaign for reforms) the action was decided by the three confederations. At the sectoral level there was a complex sharing of control between the union, the local union organisation and the workers themselves. In factory-level disputes the *delegati* and the assembly of workers decided on the action. In sum, the period saw a marked shift towards the base in the control of strikes.

The absence of an *interprofessionnel* level and the illegality of unofficial strikes differentiates Germany from France and Italy as far as the question of control of strikes is concerned. Nevertheless, there is still evidence of a growing role for the base, not only in unofficial strikes but also within official action. (In practice, sanctions have not been used against unofficial strikers, either by employers or the union.) The history of strikes in the past decade has been one of alternation between unofficial and official action. After two unofficial strike waves (1906-7 and 1969) the unions became sensitive to the combativeness of the rank-and-file and instituted a new form of action: apparently spontaneous strikes, developed as warnings during the course of negotiations and in fact sustained by the unions. This did not however prevent a new wave of unofficial actions in 1972-3 over new issues, including conditions of work. In 1973 the unions began to conduct their own strikes on this issue. While these developments are not strong, they do indicate an increased role for the base, as does the growing importance of *Vertrauensleute* as instigators of strikes.

In Britain the role of the base has been important for a long period. Unofficial strikes are no new phenomenon; they constitute the vast majority of strikes, even if they do not always constitute a significant number of striker days. Sometimes these strikes are controlled by shop-stewards, but frequently they are actions by the workers themselves (what Turner *et al.* (1967) have termed the unofficial-unofficial strike). In contrast with Germany, there is no clear distinction between official and unofficial strikes; a dispute which starts unofficially may be adopted by the union and might in some cases then become unofficial again if the workers reject an agreement reached by the union (viz. the dock strike of July 1970). The practices of unions, and the procedures whereby they decide to recognise a strike, vary widely. While the late 1960s saw an increase in pressure from the base in those sectors with centralised bargaining (e.g. much of the public sector), two other major developments have been: (1) the (eventually unsuccessful) attempts of both

Labour (1969) and Conservative (1971) governments to render unofficial strikes illegal; and (2) the growth in official strikes in monopolistic sectors and the public services from 1969 onwards.

Strikes in Belgium are essentially factory-level strikes which often start unofficially and are subsequently recognised by the union. As the Limbourg mining strike showed, while a spontaneous strike is always started with strong participation by the workers, they may lose control during its development to political factions, external groups and the unions' apparatus. After the national tripartite conference which followed the strikes of 1970 the control of workers over their actions received a certain institutionalisation: they were permitted to hold meetings in the factory during hours of work.

*Summary:* The above analysis has indicated that everywhere there has been growing control by the mass of workers over their conflicts, in some places indicated by spontaneous strikes and in others by new structures of representation. This has in turn entailed a shift in the location of strikes towards the factory level. In some instances this new control has been institutionalised in the recognition of new rights.

The reaction of the unions has been varied. In the UK the TUC, far from opposing unofficial strikes, resisted a law which was designed to control them. In Germany and Belgium the first response was to counter them, but this then changed. In France and Italy acceptance of the new role of the base has not prevented opposition to certain forms of extra-union organisations such as strike committees. The unions have also reactivated themselves, launching large official actions in order at least to co-ordinate the otherwise disordered militancy and attain new objects. They have also in each case reinforced their factory-level organisation, with the double purpose of securing a better expression of the base but also of avoiding chaos in the future. By the end of the period the growing role of the rank-and-file had maintained itself but had become more channelled.

## DISPUTE FORMS

Once the scope of dispute action and its organisation have been decided upon, the strikers have still to settle the question of what actual tactics to use.

*The wider use of more radical forms of action:* The form of action undertaken may aim at disrupting production activities to a greater or lesser degree with, ultimately, all-out strike action leading to production being halted altogether. Other forms of action can substantially perturb activities without the strikers incurring total loss of earnings. These include repeated shop-floor strikes spaced at either regular or irregular intervals, or co-ordinated sector-by-sector stoppages, affecting alternately one shop or work-group and then another, as well as acts of industrial sabotage. Where the entire work force does not take part, work is more easily disrupted by sit-ins, or setting up strike pickets, and preventing supplies from entering or leaving the plant. Beyond this, the use of physical intimidation, including sequestration, is not aimed at

affecting production but is more a means of exercising physical or moral pressure. Where goods (i.e. products or machinery) are appropriated from the plant, they may be used as bargaining material in negotiations.

The issue of forms of action has been at the centre of debate on strike action during recent years in France and Italy, though less so in Italy since 1969. In France, certain aspects of specially tough strikes in 1967, such as those at Saviem (motor vehicles) and Rhodiaceta (artificial fibres), prefigured the further more marked strike activity of 1968. As far as the 1968 strikes themselves were concerned, such forms of action as sit-ins, evicting top management from the plant, strikers taking over plant security duties and continuing some form of production activity were by no means the general run of things; but they were nevertheless sufficiently widespread to provide subsequently a permanent talking-point. In 1969, the central issues of debate were production stoppages due to *grèves-bouchons* (where strategically-placed work-groups down tools (at Renault)), and industrial sabotage (at the Chantiers de France shipyards in Dunkirk), while in 1970 it was the sequestration of management, and in 1971 and 1972, all-out strike action and the use of various kinds of intimidation. In 1973, an upsurge in overall debate was caused by the Lip dispute, which revitalised all those hard-line forms of action that had come to the fore over the past few years. These covered *grèves perlées* (concerted go-slow action), *grèves tournantes* (sector-by-sector stoppages), street demonstrations, sequestration, the appropriation of a 'booty' (the stock of watches), as well as the documents required for negotiating purposes, factory occupation, work-ins, selling off the production and making unofficial payouts to employees. Also, during the same period, the Péchiney-Noguères dispute (chemicals) raised the question of forms of action in continuous process plants – should the strikers maintain plant safety measures or not?

For Italian strikers, co-ordinated dispute activity within a large-scale production unit is undertaken with a view to paralysing production at the least cost to the workers. A judicious application of strike action *a singhiozzo* (shop-floor strikes) and *a scacchiera* (co-ordinated in-plant stoppages) soon leads to production chaos. Revived forms of action also manifested themselves through the development of practices such as blocking the factory gates to stop goods from entering and leaving the plant, marching through the production shops and carrying along any undecided workers, go-slows, absenteeism, industrial sabotage, taking a hard line against non-strikers, non-cooperative tactics, out-and-out strike action and the physical intimidation of works supervisors.

As for Great Britain, the fact that a tougher line in strike action is not the central issue of debate does not mean that it does not exist. There have for example been an increasing number of co-ordinated unofficial shop-floor strikes and plant sit-ins, together with more widespread picketing activity, including the use of highly organised flying pickets (moving from one plant to another, and possibly picketing plants that are customers of their own industry – this tactic was used to considerable effect by the dock-workers and

in the 1972 miners' and building workers' disputes, though it had in fact already been used in certain isolated cases since the beginning of 1970). Other strike tactics are more peculiar to Britain. A case in point is the use of the ban on overtime, of particular importance when carried out by maintenance workers in industries where maintenance is often carried out solely outside working hours. Working to rule, a tactic that has been used by the railwaymen for example, pays in those situations where efficient working activity is only ensured if formal work-rules are ignored. Elsewhere, where no formal work-rules exist, go-slow tactics, working unenthusiastically and unimaginatively, are often all that is required to create the desired disruption. A further form of action that is practically unknown in other countries is the secondary boycott. This consists of taking strike action in a firm with which there is no direct dispute, the aim being to stop purchases from or deliveries to a firm against which the union wants to bring pressure but where it is not possible for any action to be organised.

In West Germany and Belgium the increasing resort to radical forms, though real enough once again, does not follow any particular line. However, for some years in Belgium combined action of a novel and highly effective kind has arisen whereby production is halted in a plant by co-ordinated strikes involving either production personnel or white-collar employees, so that the management is obliged to pay the wages of the workers not on strike when in effect the plant is at a complete standstill. The use of sit-ins as an offensive tactic has also developed more widely, together with practising work-ins and disposing of production on to the market (though such 'active' occupations, as in the Ampex dispute, are still the exception).

Thus, over the last few years, in differing ways according to the various countries, renewed forms of industrial conflict of an increasingly radical tendency have appeared. Their radical nature breaks with the habitual rules of the game, to the temporary discomfiture of the capitalist system, and as they are undertaken at the actual place of work they objectively challenge the maintenance of the means of production in private hands.

Increasingly radical action is not a haphazard occurrence within the general-run of strike activity (see below). It is related to activity of a certain particular scope and organisation, and is more frequent during an upsurge in strike activity (such as during May-June 1968 in France, the Italian 'hot autumn', September 1969 in West Germany, and the winter and spring of 1970 in Belgium). Nevertheless, such strike waves have their own built-in momentum, and radical forms are maintained following the period of increased militancy. This affects plant-level disputes in particular, and occasionally strikes in monopoly sectors (as in Britain), though it is much less frequent in national or regional industry-wide disputes (except where there is a confrontation with the forces of law and order). It tends to take place more in disputes that have a medium-sized coverage and is also linked to the duration of the strike activity, since it arises in movements of either very short or long duration.

Is there any connection between this phenomenon and such spontaneous

action as occurs in certain disputes? A number of examples, in West Germany as well as in Italy and Belgium, show that some link does exist between radical action and spontaneity. Nevertheless, a strike such as that at the Lip works in France, the radicalism of which went beyond anything that had ever been attained in France up until then, owes nothing to spontaneity. Action of some consequence over previous years paved the way for the 1973 strike, and when certain forms were opted for, it was subsequent to a long maturing period. Rather than being dependent upon spontaneity, radical forms of action are apparently more closely correlated with rank-and-file control (with plant-level trade union militants also being considered part of the rank-and-file). The increasing role played by the rank-and-file also therefore expresses itself through the extent to which the choice falls upon more radical forms of action.

The hypothesis made here is that there are two types of 'radicalism': first, 'explosive' radicalism allied to anarcho-syndicalism is no doubt having a temporary revival, whereas 'planned' radicalism is an entirely novel form that has some chances of being pursued. Explosive radicalism is characterised by its lack of preparation and also frequently by being dependent upon action on the part of management in calling into question any previously acquired gain (when it is not just a case of out-and-out provocation). A further feature is its isolated nature within a particular strike (it does not form an integral part of an overall radical strategy), or within the general run of disputes in a particular plant (where radicalism is and remains an exceptional state of affairs), or within a particular production shop or a particular occupational group. It is an expression of total rejection, of being 'sick to the teeth'; the aim is not simply to obtain the 'pragmatic' satisfaction of having a particular grievance resolved. However, such action cannot be said to be completely effective.

Planned radicalism is, in contrast, characterised by a certain amount of preparation. It brings together a whole series of radical actions during the actual course of events in a given dispute and in previous strikes at the firm in question; it co-ordinates action from one establishment to the next. It is above all else an offensive and not a defensive tactic. It seeks not only to resolve the grievance, but also to attain a more lasting change in employer/employee relations. It is also charged with an expressive connotation, brandishing the collective strength of those involved and proclaiming their total opposition to the other side. It has finally a symbolical connotation, in that by rejecting the accepted rules, it may go so far as to symbolise a different set of social relationships and another model of society.

*Resolving grievances through direct forms of action:* In discussing radical forms of action, something must be said about those disputes in which grievances are resolved by actually living them out, in other words by undertaking direct action. Here, instead of the workers concerned raising a grievance, with the demand that it be resolved and if needs be forcing the issue by recourse to strike action, they decide to put into direct practice the result that is sought

after, without going a roundabout way via negotiations with management or the employer (even though such negotiations may in the end lead to the result obtained through direct action).

It goes without saying that this process may not be used to obtain a wage increase, but it can to some extent affect issues concerned with the way work is organised, employee representation and security of employment. In Great Britain, direct action is a traditional and commonly pursued aspect of industrial relations; it also occurs in Italy and in France, where it harks back to those tactical methods that were given a theoretical basis by revolutionary syndicalists during the early years of the century. It is however unknown in Belgium and Western Germany, or at least is not the subject of any substantial debate.

In Britain, the phenomenon of 'unilateral job control' has a long history, but in recent years has extended to wider sectors of workers. Certain skilled workers are able to control apprenticeship levels and the manning levels in a particular shop; they may reserve such and such a job for the work-group or, on the other hand, refuse to do it. And it is not just the skilled workers who establish their own 'custom and practice' rules, since this is prevalent in most plants and involves many workers. As unwritten rules, 'custom and practice' forms a web of tacitly accepted agreements on job methods, supervisory control and payment procedures, and as such they are closely allied to direct action to the extent that they pre-suppose some substantial control on the part of the workers. Any interference by management produces an immediate reaction. An attempt was made in the mid-1960s to reduce the scope of custom and practice through productivity agreements. Other forms of direct action in Britain are such practices as banning overtime and mass absenteeism on certain days, such as New Years Day (until 1974, when it became a public holiday). A further illustration of using direct action over employment security occurred with the bankruptcy of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders in 1970. Here the workers decided to carry on production to ensure the company's survival (from the workers' point of view, there were two aims: to obtain an alternative solution from the government, and to continue production in order to supply market needs). This was then a form of direct action: the issue of a company's survival was not negotiated over, things were simply kept going by maintaining production. UCS set a trend that was followed in subsequent years: in 1974, such action was undertaken by workers of the *Scottish Daily News* in Glasgow and also by the Triumph Meriden motorbike workers when their plants were threatened by closure.

In Italy, at the peak of the cycle of disputes in 1969-70, workers in several plants organised changes in work organisation on their own initiative, cutting down on work-rates, altering hours, reorganising job routines, and refusing various jobs. By this means they actually achieved demands that had been set down in the combined union platform for negotiation at industry level. Here it can clearly be seen how direct action swings the balance effectively in favour of the workers; management is presented with a *fait accompli* which is subsequently ratified in negotiations. Direct action in Italy has also covered

further areas of grievance, one being that of work-place representation: worker delegates have been imposed before being given recognition by agreement, and in the same way mass meetings have been held even though they did not form part of institutionally accepted workers' rights. It was the workers in fact who took the right to organise meetings, while the *delegati* took upon themselves the right to represent the work force as a whole and conduct negotiations with management. What is more, recent experience in Italy does no more than reproduce a situation that has occurred repeatedly throughout the history of the labour movement: the right to strike and the right to representation have always been conquered before being consented. Moreover, direct action is used in Italy over matters dealing with general living conditions (as opposed to working conditions). Rent increases and public transport fare rises have been rejected, with people continuing to pay the previous rates, while in certain cases unoccupied housing has been taken over by force, disputes of this nature being on occasion backed up by the unions.

In France, there has been a revival in the tradition of direct action which had been laid on one side for some time. It has been used to avoid redundancies, Lip being the obvious example in that, during the early stages of the dispute, watch production was in part continued. The aim here was not only to maintain the activity of the strikers, but also to keep the strike fund topped up. It moreover meant the fulfilment of the desired objective, i.e. keeping plant activity going and preserving employment levels. Lip set the trend in disputes where maintaining employment stability was the main issue, and where it was also feasible to carry on with activity. Another example was the case of the passenger ship *France*, kept at sea for nearly a month by the crew in protest against the decision by the shipping company to lay her up. Like their Italian counterparts, French workers have imposed their right to hold open meetings within the plant by simply going ahead with them. Work-place mass meetings are still not recognised in France, and when industry-wide protest is planned by the central union confederations the workers are called on to hold shop-floor meetings, not only so that they can decide upon the actual means of taking part in the stoppage, but beyond this to apply in practice a demand which they seek to obtain through negotiated means. The most highly developed areas in which direct action occurs are those covered by working conditions and job organisation. In a situation where they have to submit continuously to the rule of hierarchy, and the sway of 'little Caesars', workers may refuse to co-operate with supervisory grades and those provisions that are set out in work-rules. Where job content lacks interest because it is fragmentary and repetitive, the workers may reduce the monotony by changing over jobs among themselves or by systematically sharing out the work to be done. Instead of keeping to the imposed work rate, they may decide on a different one, and as this will invariably be less than what went before, such direct action takes the form of output restriction or go-slow action. Where working hours are too long, too piecemeal, too variable, poorly organised and fixed unilaterally, the workers may collectively decide on different hours. The working week is reduced by walking out an hour or two

before the weekend, by cutting out overtime hours, weekend work, and any hours worked to make up for lost time due to stoppages, or extra breaks might be taken during a particular shift. Direct action can be less straightforward where a plant's safety conditions place the workers' physical well-being in jeopardy: they might for example simply refuse to work if safety regulations are not applied, though this could not be classed as direct action, since any improvements are subject to a decision taken further up the hierarchy or at top management level.

As is the case with other radical forms of action, direct action is once again closely linked with increasing rank-and-file control. More often than not limited to within the plant itself (except in Italy where it occasionally goes beyond these bounds), direct action may involve only part of the workforce, a particular shop or occupational group. This fact affects the significance of direct action, which remains an open question, since it may be used purely for sectoral gains or be inspired by an outright anti-capitalist outlook.

## TOWARDS AN INTERPRETATION OF RENEWED FORMS OF INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT.

These few pages are unable to give an overall picture explaining all the reasons behind revived industrial militancy in Western Europe. However, since the revival in dispute activity has been particularly marked at the level of individual undertakings, it is apparent that when it comes to providing any explanation, it is worth using this level as a starting-point.

In what way, at plant level, are the workers confronted with the economic situation in both its structural and short-term aspects, or the political system, or the trade union structure, or the industrial relations system; and how in turn do these various 'systems' look upon the issue of plant-level activity? It is not in fact possible to deal with each of these factors in isolation. The economic situation, for example, only becomes of consequence because the stage is occupied by those institutional figures who take part in the negotiating system: the political establishment, the employers and the unions. Thus the effect of any increase in unemployment will not be the same where, say, an agreement allows for maintaining wages for a period of one year, or where, on the other hand, the worker loses half his income from one day to the next. Taking the individual firm as the starting-point is also justified since here is an expression of the division of society into different classes; this is the overriding basic factor in militant dispute activity, something which is an accepted fact, and upon which there is no need to dwell any further.

### PLANT-LEVEL STRIKES: A FLEXIBLE RESPONSE TO VARIED ECONOMIC SITUATIONS

*Incidence of the prevailing economic situation:* The specific aspects of forms of

dispute in the contemporary period, given both the prevailing and overall structural changes in economic affairs, can only be understood by acknowledging that all industrial undertakings cannot and do not react to it in the same fashion. The general development in the economic situation is tempered according to the various sectors of economic activity and individual firms.

A few examples will suffice. The first half of the 1960s was marked in the countries of Europe (including Great Britain, not at that time a member of the Common Market) by an expansion in trade following the removal of tariff barriers. The increased competition thus brought about meant more stringent price-setting criteria. This resulted in rationalisation measures in certain firms, though varying forms were used to achieve this, with either the creation of new plants that possibly made use of hitherto non-industrial manpower, or the closure of obsolete plant facilities, or amalgamation, and increasing resort to greater technology in production. Elsewhere, priority could be given to a policy of cutting back on earnings and other gains consented to wage-earners; incomes policy was established and operated to effective purpose, particularly in those undertakings that are more under the control of the state. What was to happen was that widespread strike action broke out following a period in which living standards had risen less rapidly whereas unemployment had shown a sharp rise.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, there were also key strike sectors in industries that were relatively unaffected by rising unemployment. In May 1968 in France, for example, it was the area of public employment (Sud-Aviation, Renault and the SNCF) which provided the signal for more widespread stoppages. Pay rises in these industries were restricted by the public authorities, but employment security is guaranteed as in no other sectors of the economy. Similarly in Britain in 1969-70, it was the public or semi-public sector that was behind strike action (with stoppages by miners, dockers, local government employees, electricity workers and BOAC pilots) and it was in these sectors that the Labour Government of the day directly applied its policy of wage restraint. Besides, in some of these sectors, such as mining and the docks, the structure of the industry was at the same time being overhauled. However, during this same period, unofficial stoppages also occurred in such flourishing firms as Fords, Dunlop and Pilkingtons.

The 1969 strike movement in West Germany and Italy originated in undertakings which were in the thick of revived activity – they had shown a notable increase in profits while wage levels had not followed the same upward path. In Belgium, the leading firms in the field of strike activity were those affected by the economic recession (such as the mines of Limbourg). In other words, the wave of strikes can be put down to an analysis of the situation by the workers as they see their own undertaking in the light of overall economic activity, or in comparison with other plants, or previous levels of activity. One explanation for the fact that the movement started at plant level is therefore this new-found capacity for economic analysis on the part of the workers.

Since they led to substantial wage increases, the initial waves of strike

action modified the economic situation. However, wage concessions result in widely varying situations from firm to firm. In one plant, the key-word in wage policy matters might be repression, while in another an active policy of intensifying production activity (with increasing line-speeds) would be adopted. Elsewhere the desired aim might be to rationalise production techniques with higher capital investment (leading eventually to redundancies). In yet another industry, whose plants are favourably situated on the market or are relatively well sheltered from competitors, rising costs can be passed on in price increases. The overall economic situation has thus been characterised by a considerable rise in the rate of price and wage increases, while a more rapid rise in living standards has also occurred (see Table 1.4). However, alongside this and after a short breathing-space, unemployment

TABLE 1.4 *Inflation and wage-earner purchasing power*

†	Price inflation in % (yearly average)	Increase in wage-earner purchasing power in % (yearly average)*
Belgium		
1967-1969	3.1	3.3
1970	4	7.1
1971-1973	5.6	8.4
France		
1965-1967	2.6	3.2
1968	4.5	8
1969-1973	6.1	5.5
Italy		
1965-1968	3	1.7
1969	2.7	7.2
1970-1973	6.6	12.8
United Kingdom		
1965-1969	4.3	2.3
1970	6.4	6.2
1971-73	8.6	4.1
West Germany		
1966-1968	2.3	2.8
1969	2.7	7.5
1970-1973	5.4	5.7

\* Purchasing power = increase in real wages, after deducting rise in price level.

† In each case, three separate periods are given: those years of relative recession, the first year in which waves of strikes occur, and subsequent years.

Source: OECD and national figures.

started to climb once again. An entirely new situation was therefore encountered, with rises in the standard of living and unemployment going hand in hand. This contrasted with the period preceding the first wave of strikes, a more 'conventional' state of affairs in which any rise in unemployment corresponded with a relatively less rapid increase in living standards. With the change in the economic climate, different firms were liable to react in different ways, and plant-level dispute activity by the workers constituted a response in keeping with this. During this phase, disputes against lay-offs, against more intensive working methods, and against repressive attitudes on the part of employers arise in those firms that are unaffected by the wage boom.

To summarise: the general economic situation before the first widespread phase of stoppages differed from that prevailing afterwards. However, neither before nor after did the economy exhibit overall crisis tendencies (at least that is until the end of 1973). In no country was there at any time concurrently a drop in production, high inflation, high unemployment levels, a fall in investment, a balance of payments deficit, a decrease in living standards, and a collapse in profits. This being the case, there was always some margin of freedom for action by the workers, particularly at plant level, at the level where actual situations varied even more widely.

The trend towards economic and technological rationalisation led, at least initially, to increasingly integrated production processes requiring higher levels of wage-earning manpower, and, as the period of greater unemployment got under way, there was hardly any let-up in the demand for such labour. Technical progress has brought with it, to use Phelps Brown's formula, a 'drift towards the plant' in bargaining activity, and this resulted in new forms of action, in just the same way as it can result in the appearance of new kinds of worker.

*Rationalisation and new forms of action:* The evolution in industrial organisation makes firms more vulnerable to strike action. Products become increasingly complex, job-tasks are broken down to a much greater extent, stock levels are reduced, fixed capital resources play a larger part in overall costs, and if the work force downs tools, white-collar employees and management staff (whose number has increased) have still to be paid, while the firm's working capital and liquid assets are cut fine. This means that if one part of the plant is shut down, not only is actual production disrupted, but financial problems also ensue as the plant must still assume a whole series of costs. The combination of loss of production and continuing fixed costs effectively means that even small groups of workers wield considerable power. The shift of power to the shop-floor lies behind the appearance of forms of action whose aim is the concerted disorganisation of production activity (spontaneous sit-down strikes, 'strategic' stoppages and the like). Plant-level strikes, controlled by the rank-and-file, are thus induced by developments in the techniques and organisation of work. Furthermore, developments in payment systems, with in certain cases less of a direct link between earnings and output, may also lie behind the

resort to certain forms of action such as go-slow activity (whereby full pay is still guaranteed though output is effectively reduced).

Revived plant-level strike action has led logically enough to reaction on the part of employers. In the short term, the only possible recourse was to undertake repressive measures, resorting to lock-outs, or laying off workers either further up or further down the production process from the strike-bound sector, or using sanctions against the strikers. Taking a hard line can be no more than a temporary solution, as it provokes increasing work-force action aimed either at doing away with the sanctions or obtaining compensation for being sent home. Those workers whose activity has been unilaterally suspended by the employer due to a stoppage in a different sector no longer accept any loss of pay (in France, action centred solely on this particular grievance was carried out by Renault workers during 1973). Alongside this, the employers have also aimed at attacking one of the prime causes of the development of plant-level strikes, the substantial power that lies in the hands of certain production shops or certain work-groups. Various solutions are used to cut down this power, though they all require a minimum of time since job reorganisation is involved. To avoid strike action by those 'strategic' few, the production process has to be made less integrated, and the links in the chain less dependent upon one another. Hence, the solution may be to start grouping job-tasks together before setting up autonomous teams of workers; or, by installing parallel production lines, different groups may be used on the same job; or each plant is assigned its own product so as to reduce plant interdependence within the same company. There is a wide variety of solutions, all linked of course to the kind of production undertaken.

The development of plant-level strikes and radical forms of action, resulting from the fact that individual work-groups are capable of disorganising an overall production structure, leads to countermeasures from employers and management and a reappraisal of work organisation '*à la Taylor*'.

*'New' workers and new forms of action?* Economic developments over the past fifteen years have provided (and have been provided by) the integration into the labour force of new groups of workers, made up of young people, women, immigrants and workers of rural origin. They have also enabled, indeed required, some level of geographical redistribution of productive activity. In France, increased industrialisation has been concentrated on the regions, at the expense of the Paris area, and the redevelopment of coalmining areas has taken place. In Belgium, industrial activity has increased in Flanders rather than in the French-speaking South, while in Italy attempts have been made to attract industry to the Southern provinces. The new wage-earners have thus been 'put to work' either in old-established expanding industries where there already existed a tradition of dispute activity, or in newly-built plants in areas that up until then had not been highly industrialised (with, as a corollary, no tradition of industry and no tradition of dispute activity), or else in entirely new sectors (such as the service industries and the commercial sector), that is to say in sectors that had experienced little opportunity of developing

traditions of industrial action. Can it be said that these levels of manpower have played a part in renewed forms of action, and especially in expanding rank-and-file control and radicalism?

Until recently the currently accepted hypothesis was that recourse to radical forms of action was in inverse proportion to trade-union influence among the work force, since what unions did was to channel grievances towards forms of action that were universally held to be 'legitimate'. This being the case, a non-unionised labour force (non-unionised either because it always had been or because of being newly-formed) would tend to resort increasingly to hard-line forms of action. However, experience has shown that a fresh look has to be taken at this hypothesis, since it is only true with respect to highly-centralised union organisations which agree to toe a traditional 'political' line in exercising pressure on the established authorities with a view to obtaining recognised majorities in favour of the working class. In recent years, however, some unions have built up a strategy based on decentralising decision-making within the organisation and taking a 'non-traditional' political line which does not regard the election process as sufficient to impose fundamental changes in society. In other words, a hypothesis which says that radicalism is tied to a lack of industrial and trade-union tradition is not the whole story. Radicalism may be equally linked to a high level of sympathy with unions of the type that has just been described (this question will be dealt with below).

In France, the hypothesis of some connection between radical forms of action and the absence of any industrial or trade union tradition is supported to some degree. Tough strikes occur more frequently in small firms located in rural surroundings or in small towns, in other words where in general the unions do not have a particularly strong foothold. Hard-line action is also more frequent where strike traditions have developed recently, at any rate since 1968. On the other hand, in those plants with a high number of female, immigrant, or young employees,<sup>6</sup> or unskilled workers (the OS - *ouvriers spécialisés*),<sup>7</sup> i.e. with a labour force that very often has no long-standing tradition behind it, radical action is no more frequent than elsewhere (though this does not of course mean that there is no such thing as radical dispute activity involving women workers or recent school-leavers).

The situation in Italy resembles that of France. Radical forms of action such as co-ordinated shop-floor stoppages and go-slow activity do occur more frequently among workers without any long-standing social adaptation to industry (among unskilled workers, young workers and immigrants from the south) or once again among workers that have no tradition of unionisation. The relationship is however not absolute, since the 'traditional' sectors may undertake typical radical forms of action, such as out-and-out unlimited strikes.

Recent years in Belgium and West Germany have also seen strikes by immigrant workers. Even though such action has been taken without waiting for union blessing, they have not opted for the most radical forms of action, even though they may have on occasion physically confronted workers from

the host country. In Great Britain, where there has been a drop in the wage-earning population, the question of 'new' workers does not arise in the same terms. Wage-earners of long standing but no tradition of militancy (whether white-collar workers, women workers or public sector employees) have begun to take strike action, but this does not automatically take extreme forms.

In each of these countries, and in particular in those whose wage-earning population has risen the most rapidly, these 'new' workers have been undertaking action for the first time. With no tradition of dispute activity, these workers are often exploited, such exploitation being one of the possible solutions to the dilemma created by the changing economic situation (see above). As a result, these workers have taken part in the development of industrial stoppages decided upon by the rank-and-file. The action they take tends to be simple in organisational terms (e.g. unlimited strike action) with occasionally more violent forms bordering on the 'explosive' radicalism defined beforehand.

What is being said here then is that 'explosive' radicalism arises in, among other areas, newly-established plants belonging to large industrial groups, located in a non-industrial environment where the work force is exploited to a greater extent than in more old-established undertakings. Unionisation is either non-existent, or recent, or has undergone a total changeover. The labour force has no tradition of industrial activity, is low-skilled and in general is used at less than its full capabilities. There are however other forms of radical action, such as the concerted disorganisation of production and direct action in all its various forms, which are in no way whatsoever related to the 'new' levels of workers. On the contrary, such action assumes a degree of organisation that presupposes a long tradition of dispute activity (or at least previous experience of the limits of 'explosive' conflict).

Variations in the economic climate do not affect different firms to the same extent; not all firms have a highly-integrated production process, and not all have recruited a fresh work force over recent years. Different firms are self-contained units, they have a different position on the market, a different organisational structure with their own distinct material resources requiring their own occupational skill level. Strike action at plant level, whether or not during periods of increased militancy, is a response tailored to the actual plant in question. This might be said to be virtually a truism, though it should be recognised that strike action at plant level has to override any centralisation imposed through the system of industrial relations, circumscribed as much by central union activity as by the employers and the authorities, for reasons analysed hereafter. Furthermore, plant-level strike action allows for increasing rank-and-file control, and enables the use of more diversified and more radical forms of action that are more suited to the production system and the acquired experience or tradition of conflict within the plant. Moreover, the plant situation provides the most effective proving ground for direct action as such.

## DISPUTE FORMS AND THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT

In order to provide an explanation of the forms of dispute activity undertaken over the previous ten years, reference must also be made to the institutionalisation of industrial conflict. The first waves of stoppages, from 1968 to 1970, and the forms which they took (i.e. co-ordination and spontaneity of action and long duration) can be related to the imperfections and shortcomings of the industrial relations institutions. Initially the occurrence reinforced the overall process of institutionalisation, encouraged in certain cases by all or some of the representatives of both sides of industry at national level: the aim was to patch up some of the gaps that existed previously in the institutional structure. But further strikes took place, this time over the principle of institutionalisation itself, and these have been characterised by different forms (un-coordinated action, rank-and-file control, tougher and more diversified forms of action, and direct action). Before looking more closely into these different periods, more should be said about what is understood by the institutionalisation of industrial conflict.

*The 'ideal model' of institutionalised industrial conflict:* Industrial conflict can be said to be institutionalised when the procedures for regulating conflicts of interest function properly. It presupposes a pyramid of levels of bargaining (*interprofessionnel, professionnel, local or regional, and plant*). Negotiations take place at each of these levels between both sides of industry, while the public authorities also take a hand. Although they acknowledge that both sides negotiate independently, the authorities may define the procedures and principles behind negotiations, provide an example in public sector employment, give financial help, and extend the overall scope of certain agreements. The unions, in view of this, may be organised on a central confederation, industry federation and plant-level branch basis. It is acknowledged that the bargaining partners do have a right to negotiate, that is to say, a right to discuss questions involving their 'constituents', a right to voice their views and organise their activities (all the way down to plant level), the ideal being to achieve joint decision-making on the basis of mutual agreement.

The system works well if each of the bargaining parties, and in particular the union side, is organised on democratic lines, with its representatives designated democratically to hold office for a certain length of time (and not for a particular package of negotiations). Once elected, they have the capacity to bind their members for the duration of the agreement, prevent strikes breaking out and sanction any member who does not keep to the rules. The agreement should cover all points dealing with working arrangements and include provisions for recourse to conciliation if there is any difference in interpreting the letter of the agreement or any other written document. It would also be desirable for the agreement to be able to adapt continually to changing circumstances and in particular to variations in the economic climate (with for example an incorporated sliding scale).

The system also assumes that the same ideological outlook is shared by all: class conflict is excluded in favour of the principle of economic growth founded upon technological progress, social harmony and the equitable distribution of the fruits of such growth. It is this principle which in effect underlies certain programmes or projects that are designated variously *Mitbestimmung*, industrial democracy, *programmation sociale*, productivity agreements, *contrats de progrès*, the Welfare State, the *Nouvelle Société*, incomes policy, the social contract, etc.

For there to be any institutionalisation of industrial conflict, not only must the unions be organised and recognised in consequence, but also they must accept the 'responsibility' involved, they must respect the contents of written agreements, and subscribe to the underlying ideology. There are therefore certain conditions favourable to the development of institutionalisation: unified unions of a reformist outlook and centralised tendencies, a left-wing orientated government in power, political stability (i.e. a solid majority and no major internal wranglings), and economic expansion.

Even when the system is realised to the full and has the benefit of the necessary favourable conditions, it is still vulnerable in certain aspects of coverage and co-ordination: the first stumbling block concerns fitting together the various levels of bargaining, since the question may be raised as to whether all issues be discussed at all levels or whether the various bodies specialise in particular issues. The other point hinges on the frequency with which agreements are negotiated. When the time for renegotiation comes round, attitudes may be hardened on both sides and any consensus on overall objectives may be blown sky-high. Besides, from time to time, the system has to face up to the problem of the level of recognition afforded to one side or the other; when national elections take place, the representativeness of the state in negotiations is undermined, and the same is true of the union side when union or work-place elections take place.

It is evident that during the period before the first waves of stoppages from 1968 to 1970 none of the countries in which we are interested provide perfect examples of such an ideal model of institutionalised industrial conflict; some come closer to it than others. The initial crisis period may be interpreted as a reaction against gaps in the system; its development centred around the plant level, this being one of the weak links in the system in all the countries concerned.

*Conflict institutionalisation before the first waves of strikes:* The degree of actual institutionalisation varies, though in each of the countries dealt with here certain conditions favouring its development (particularly with the arrival in office of the reformist left) do start to appear and take form.

It is in Belgium that such institutionalisation has apparently reached a consummate level. Industry-wide national agreements on *programmation sociale* have existed since 1960, and there are countless national bodies with trade union representatives sitting on them, while tripartite 'summit' meetings are a regular occurrence. At industry level there are over fifty

bipartite commissions. Matters are probably less clear-cut within individual companies or plants, even though union delegations and councils do operate and are accepted at this level. The unions themselves are strong; the FGTB and the CSC join forces in putting forward demands and, before negotiations, they arrange to make a common stand. Moreover, while declaring themselves independent of the political parties, their ideas are in line with the governing Socialist-Christian-Social coalition. They take a hand in decision-making activities within Belgian society and their overall power was even further reinforced during the period in question; it was in 1963 that they were first able to sign collective agreements limiting advantages to union members only. The industrial relations system operates through an arrangement of delegated authority, and there is no consultation with the rank-and-file when national agreements are signed. Such agreements normally cover a two-year period, and explicitly contain a 'social peace' (no-strike) clause. If a dispute does arise, mediation and conciliation procedures are laid down. The agreements also tend to deal with wider issues (social measures and double pay for the third week of annual holidays, etc.). This system concords with the ideological framework implied by its title - *programmation sociale*. The institutionalisation of industrial conflict in Belgium has progressed far, but nevertheless contains two weak points: plant-level activity and the highly rigid form of agreements.

By the end of the period the system in Germany came close to the Belgian situation. An already high level of institutionalisation was further encouraged by a series of events in the mid-1960s. First, in 1966 the SPD came to office in the Grand Coalition with the CDU-CSU. In 1967 the DGB agreed to work hand-in-hand with the government, and in 1968 the SPD set up its own trade-union council whose task it was to work out the party's economic and social policy. Again in 1968 the unions accepted to sign agreements covering longer periods. A high degree of institutionalisation exists in industry-level bargaining (especially on a regional basis), and the unions are wealthy, rigidly structured and highly centralised. At the national, *interprofessionnel* level, on the other hand, institutionalisation has not gone so far. In fact it began when the SPD came to share office, though the DGB as such has little authority over its member federations. At the opposite end, the plant level is at once a strong and a weak link within the system. It is strong in that structures based on class collaboration exist at this level (in mining and the steel industry there is *Mitbestimmung* while in the rest of industry a works council is in duty bound to collaborate fully with the employer). The weak link is the absence of the union as such inside the plant; union men on the shop-floor and plant-level union branches do not exist in the eyes of the law. What is more, no clearly defined bargaining activity exists at this level; industry agreements are improved upon at the plant but there is no guarantee whatsoever with respect to any additional gains conceded to the work force. As in Belgium, the negotiators who sign the agreements are not responsible to the workers, the duration of agreements averages eighteen months, 'social peace' goes without saying, and conciliation and arbitration procedures are well-oiled.

Institutionalisation at top level is not up to that of Belgium, this being largely due to the SPD being kept in opposition until 1966. Since then, however, the conditions have existed for such institutionalisation as we have seen to develop. No ideological obstacle stands in the way when it is considered that in 1959 the SPD adopted a welfare-orientated programme, leaving by the wayside any prospect of national planning and any widespread nationalisation of industry, with the DGB following suit at its national conference in Düsseldorf in 1963.

In Britain, where the institutionalisation of industrial conflict is virtually second nature to the unions, there were visible signs of it wearing thin at the start of the period dealt with here. The most apparent evidence of this was the spread of unofficial strikes. Nevertheless, the opportunity was there for the system to be given a new lease of life without the risk of any major social crisis when Labour won the 1964 general election. Given the traditional links uniting the Labour Party with the unions, nothing should have prevented reform. No ideological obstacle stood in the way; British unions are by no means revolutionary. Reforms and attempted reforms were to cover the levels at which bargaining takes place as well as those taking part, and before any decisions were taken on the subject the Donovan Commission was appointed (in 1965) to allow wide consultation with all parties concerned. On the national industry-wide front, institutionalisation had gained ground with the setting up of the National Economic Development Council in 1961–2 and the National Board for Prices and Incomes in 1965. At industry level, however, where in principle the more important agreements are signed, disorder prevailed. In each industry there was a multitude of unions (craft unions, industry unions, general unions, white-collar unions) and jurisdictional disputes broke out incessantly, while on the employers' side things were no better since not all companies belonged to an employers association. The eventual Report of the Commission (in 1968) advocated more simple structures, with union amalgamations similar to that carried out by the AUEW. The Report acknowledged the existence of plant-level bargaining, even though it had no formal basis. The spokesman in negotiations with the employer was nominally the local union branch secretary, while there might be up to thirty unions involved in any one plant. In fact, the person actually negotiating on behalf of the workers was often the shop steward, the workers' representative at shop-floor level, with a minor role in union affairs. And it was the shop steward who provided the prime target, as it was he who was considered to be the instigator of unofficial wild-cat strikes. Thus the Donovan Report and the 1969 Government White Paper proposed reform at this level with a view to institutionalising dispute activity: unions would be strengthened (with the right to obtain certain information for negotiating purposes, having representatives nominated on to certain boards), and workers would have increasing protection against unfair dismissal; plant-level agreements would be given formal recognition (with procedures for applying the industry-level agreement, setting up plant-level grievance or disputes procedures, and laying down the rights and obligations of shop stewards).

These reforms were never to come to fruition under the Labour Government. In exchange for these concessions to the unions (together with an end to wage restraint), it also sought to regulate strike activity more severely, with a view in particular to preventing the outbreak of unofficial strikes. The TUC was against this and the Bill was never passed, the TUC simply giving an undertaking to use persuasion on its members – wishful thinking when the activities of shop stewards were largely outside the control of the union hierarchy. The period from 1964 to 1969 was therefore a vain attempt at increasing the institutionalisation of industrial conflict, even though the coming of Labour to office augured well at the outset.

In contrast to what may be seen in the three preceding cases, any institutionalisation measures in Italy do not have the advantage of logistic support from reformist-orientated trade-union organisations. An anti-capitalist line is stated explicitly in the rules of the majority union, the CGIL. Institutionalisation must therefore force its way up in the face of opposition on a doctrinal level, though it was to be encouraged by the formation of the initial left of centre governments in 1962. The history of bargaining activity in Italy is one of gradual decentralisation, while the previous negotiation procedure and level of bargaining was never entirely repudiated. Following a period of highly centralised bargaining, the possibility of negotiating industry-level agreements was accomplished towards the mid-1950s. Plant-level agreements are of more recent date. Such a prospect was anticipated by the CISL in 1953, and the CGIL rallied in 1957, while the employers finally accepted them in 1963 over piecework agreements, job evaluation, and work organisation matters. At the start of the period under review, the three levels of bargaining did exist: the unions showed themselves to be substantially in favour of branch (i.e. industry) agreements in conjunction with plant-level agreements. The agreements themselves were fixed term ones, though of fairly long duration (on average three years), and resort to conciliation was written in. These elements in themselves provided a solid institutional basis, but no rules existed as regards the right to strike. Plant-level bargaining was recognised by all sides (measures directed against trade union militants had become less intense), but this level was without doubt the weak link in the system. The development of plant-level activity was held in check in 1963–5, years of economic recession. The activity of intra-plant commissions and plant-level union branches stagnated and became moribund, while, as regards the bipartite committees that were set up in 1966 to sort out differences over payment-by-results, the workers' spokesmen were nominated by the unions on a regional basis. Plant-level bargaining therefore did exist, but there was no union organisation at plant level that in fact controlled the work force as a whole as well as its representatives. Though there was some progress in institutionalisation during this period, it was far from complete when the strikes of the 'hot autumn' broke out. The CGIL remains a union with a revolutionary outlook, regulation of the right to strike is limited, and union organisation at plant level is totally ineffectual.

As in Italy, the institutionalisation of conflict in France comes up against a

primarily ideological obstacle. The majority union, the CGT, openly voices a line based on class conflict and, during this period, trade-union attitudes against institutionalisation measures became more deeply entrenched when in 1964 the CFTC became the CFDT, rejecting its previous Christian-Social stand. In the face of the unions' ideological outlook, the authorities attempted an institutionalisation strategy, designated *participation*. Only the left could have pulled off such a formula and possibly succeeded in convincing the unions; but the left was in opposition. As it was, only the two minority confederations (FO and CFTC) supported *participation*, a concept which very soon amounted to no more than a profit-sharing scheme. However, in terms of formal legislation, France had gone further along the road towards institutionalisation. All three kinds of agreement were possible (*interprofessionnel*, *professionnel* and plant-level), even though not all had the same scope. There was however a general trend away from negotiating activity: at the time no *interprofessionnel* agreement had been reached since 1958; plant-level agreements were few and far between; and only industry agreements (at national, regional, or local level) were of any consequence. At plant level, the unions as such were not recognised, the *comité d'entreprise* was so designed as to concur with management attitudes, and the duties of the *délégués du personnel* were solely to ensure the application of legal provisions and collective agreements. No formal basis existed for the negotiation of supplementary advantages, since this could be undertaken through either institution or via the union machinery outside the plant. The results of bargaining were hardly ever set out in any institutional framework: more often than not, agreements were given no fixed term, were negotiated without reference to rank-and-file opinion, left untouched the right to strike, and made provision for mediation and arbitration procedures that were never utilised. As a whole the level of institutionalisation was very slight, though more and more attempts were to be made throughout the period to build up some sort of framework. The most surprising aspect is that the initial offensive was given an ideological bent (through the *participation* experiment). Alongside this, measures were taken to strengthen the union machinery outside the plant (with in the early 1960s subsidies being granted for training union officers). The year 1963 saw the beginnings of tripartite discussions with the *Conférence de Revenus*. Provisions were made in the same year to limit strike action in the public employment sector, and, from 1965 onwards, the trend towards institutionalisation became more marked with the arrival at the head of the CNPF of leaders who endorsed negotiating activity, together with revived *interprofessionnel* negotiation over employment security, and various noises from government circles designed to incite the two sides to come to the negotiating table. But the drive towards institutionalisation passed over affairs at plant level; the compulsion attached to setting up profit-sharing agreements served to emphasise differences, while the plants were still out of bounds to the unions. Moreover, the drive towards increasing the level of institutionalisation, in the years 1965–7, occurred in a context of economic recession (see above), and this hindered whatever chances it had of success.

*The strikes of 1968-70: failings in conflict institutionalisation and dispute forms:* Throughout the 1960s, increased institutionalisation of conflict occurred in each country, though nowhere did it attain the degrees spelt out previously in the ideal model. Activity at plant level remained in all cases the weak link in the system, either because serious negotiation on actual problems in any systematic form was just not possible, or because the union side, as a possible bargaining party on behalf of the work force, was not recognised as a valid spokesman.

The strikes of 1968-70 thus appear as a wave of plant-level disputes, over which the trade-union bodies had little or no control, given no formal authority inside the plant. These movements did of course have their counter-institutional aspect (whereby the underlying ideology was decried by left-wing factions inside the unions or by extremist groups), but they also raised the issue of deficiencies in institutionalisation at the level of individual undertakings.

In Belgium, the strikes were aimed first and foremost against the system from within, with protests against extending the duration of agreements, against the absence of clauses to adapt to improved economic conditions, against 'social peace' clauses, and against the absence of rank-and-file control in negotiations. Another source of dispute arose over rank-and-file grievances not being followed up, in that there was no facility at plant level for workers to express themselves, certain claims just could not be processed through the system, and grievances were diverted into straight pay demands which are easier to put through the machinery. Like the Belgian strikes, those occurring in Germany in 1969 revolved around up-dating the industrial relations system. Their aim was: to guarantee gains achieved at plant level; to be able to modify provisions in the current agreement in line with improvements in the economy; or to set up a formal system of putting forward demands arising within the plant, and deal with issues that were covered to only a limited degree or not at all at other levels, such as working conditions.

The situation in Britain was that the plant-level disputes<sup>8</sup> which broke out following Labour's withdrawal of its Industrial Relations Bill were not so much in protest against an anachronistic system of bargaining at the lowest level but a reaffirmation of strength to maintain an acquired level of shop-floor power. A breach had already been made in the measure of control exercised in certain areas by the workers through the introduction of productivity agreements. Such disputes were in protest *a posteriori* against the policy of wage restraint (abandoned in June 1969: hence the rise in the number of disputes) and also against restrictions on the right to strike. In other words, plant-level strikes in Britain were of a more openly anti-institutional strain, with the prevailing turmoil enabling the workers to gain greater control than a more formal bargaining system could provide.

In Italy, the election of strike leaders in the 'hot autumn' stoppages (though already occurring from the end of 1968), the role played by shop-floor meetings and the uncompromising manner in which demands aimed at enabling grievances to be voiced at rank-and-file level were pressed to the hilt,

all show that dispute ranged over the weakest point in the Italian industrial relations system, the plant level, outside which the mass of miscellaneous day-to-day grievances other than on pay questions could not be dealt with. In certain particular undertakings, dispute ran deeper and aimed at the process of institutionalisation then under way, especially where extreme left-wing political groups took a hand. In any case, the unions do not seem to have altogether diverted the aims pursued within the overall movement by using them to institutionalise their own presence at plant level. The actual dispute forms themselves, the part played by unofficial *delegati* and shop-floor meetings, belied the presence of any demands formulated on worker representation. However, following 1969, demands more often than not did go through union channels.

In France, in May and June 1968, the central tripartite negotiations (the Grenelle talks) that took place half-way through the wave of stoppages provided an added facet to conflict institutionalisation. The talks themselves were organised at top national level, something that was the exception before the strikes; and they led to the unions being accepted in the plants, though without yet giving them the right to negotiate at this level. The pursuit of strike action following these negotiations may lead one to believe that the strikers were not satisfied with simply having the gaps in the bargaining system filled in, while the views propounded on *autogestion* could encourage the feeling that the movement was also orientated against institutionalisation. However, the promise of a more fundamental opposition to the system could not bear fruit without a revolutionary theoretical basis and without the existence of political forces renouncing the use of electoral means. The second part of the May movement was thus itself constrained to provide its own contribution to the process of institutionalisation, primarily at industry and plant level.

*The consequences of the initial waves of strikes:* The first waves of strikes in the years 1968–70 were to lead to a reinforcement in the process of conflict institutionalisation. The unions, for their part, were to aim at taking over rank-and-file militancy so as to integrate it within their own strategy, and use the force behind it to increase their influence at the level where they were the least strong, i.e. at plant level. The phase of increased militancy was also to provide a lesson to the authorities and the employers; as they too were to hasten the institutionalisation process, either taking a tough line by further restricting the right to strike (so as to prevent conflicts of interest being resolved through out-and-out dispute action), by taking measures to reinforce the unions' role, or by launching a vast ideological offensive dressed up in a different vocabulary (aimed at working up issues that commanded less active collective militancy).

The high level of industrial stoppages further revealed to the labour movement the extent of its own strength – which might (1) be used to rejuvenate conflict institutionalisation, but might also (2) serve to undermine it. The increasingly radical dispute forms arising after the initial wave of

strikes thus provide evidence of a tendency to combat such institutionalisation, emphasised here and there by a revival in revolutionary ideology among certain sections of the workers. The two opposing tendencies will be discussed in turn.

*Reinforcing the institutionalisation of industrial conflict:* Such institutionalisation may be backed up by tough measures, such as banning or limiting the use of strike action, which, to the minds of those responsible for such measures, should automatically result in the use of peaceful means in resolving labour disputes. It is debatable whether repression and the use of force are very effective in attaining the desired response, since they might well produce the opposite effect and increase the opposition of those against whom such measures are directed. This may explain the fact that a tough line has not been used in all instances. Following the May 1968 strikes the law in France was made more severe, with strikes being limited in broadcasting and, in particular, with the so-called 'anti-wrecker' law (the *loi anti-casseur*) of 1970 that provided for stiffer penalties and gave a new legal basis to sanctions against sequestrations, sit-ins, acts of violence, assault and unlawful assembly. On the other side of the coin, actual case-law decisions show more flexibility, in that sanctions were no longer applied after failure to give strike notice in public-sector employment and on the reappearance there of *grèves tournantes* (co-ordinated sector-by-sector stoppages), nor were political strikes condemned as such; and, even though those involved in sit-ins could be evicted, sanctions were hardly ever taken against them.

In Britain the Conservatives returned to power in 1970 and immediately set about remodelling Labour's project for regulating strike action. In future, immunity in law would be granted only to those organising official strikes of duly registered trade unions. Where strikes constituted a threat to the national interest, compulsory cooling-off periods and secret strike ballots could be called. Go-slows, work-to-rules and overtime bans could become potentially unlawful. The new Act was hardly ever applied (see the paper by C. J. Crouch in the companion volume, p. 247), and its effect was cut short in 1974 by the return of Labour to office. The situation in other countries did not lead to any stricter control on the right to strike following the period of increased militancy, though it was still no more difficult for any perpetrators of radical action to be sent to court or for other sanctions to be imposed on them by their employers (through dismissal).

Repression is thus frequently no more than a palliative that the ruling class knows will not of itself lead to the sought-after institutionalisation. It serves as a kind of crash-barrier to be erected as a last resort if other institutionalised means fail to work. Among these latter is a whole series of different measures that deal with levels of bargaining but also seek to confer on the bargaining parties a wider role within the system of industrial relations. The institutional offensive 'covers all fronts', though only the plant level is analysed here,<sup>9</sup> this in effect being the weakest link in the system. What is more, it is at this very same level that institutionalisation is to be contested to the greatest degree through the various dispute forms.

Institutional developments at plant level manifest themselves through various different changes, in that the individual firm becomes a scene of bargaining in its own right, the union is more and more often acknowledged its place in the plant, and the 'traditional' structures of management/work force co-operation (such as the works councils in each country) find themselves invested with a greater number of functions. The desired aim is therefore to institutionalise conflict by setting up machinery to allow for the exchange of views with *a priori* no discussion points excluded, and each side recognising the other as a valid opposite number. In France, from the end of the year 1968 the presence of unions inside the plant has thus been institutionalised in law, though they were given no explicit role in bargaining at this level. The consultative function of the *comité d'entreprise* has been widened time and time again, with a greater say in overall employment levels, the employment of women and young people, and questions of working conditions and recurrent training measures. Since 1968 also, plant-level agreements, based on national or industry agreements, have become more numerous, though the right to hold shop-floor meetings during working hours has been recognised in only a small minority of firms.

Italian unions have also strengthened their position at the plant level since 1969; councils made up of unofficial *delegati* have gradually gained recognition in collective agreements, and these *delegati* are more and more coming into the union fold. At the same time, working conditions are being dealt with in plant agreements, and the rank-and-file is consulted regularly over formulating basic demands. The workers are guaranteed the right to hold mass meetings, though they play a less important part than in 1968 and 1969. The prospect of increased institutionalisation even appears to have the partial blessing of top-level trade-unionists when it is considered that the General Secretary of the CGIL (Lama) came out in favour of a unilateral declaration on the part of the unions by which they would pledge not to seek any demands at plant level between one agreement and the next and to come down on any sectoral tendencies.

In Belgium, following the tripartite economic and social conference of March 1970, several agreements backed up the role played by employee representation machinery at plant level: henceforward, the *conseils d'entreprise* would have to be consulted over the firm's general economic prospects, developments in employment levels, questions on the retraining and readaptation of workers and job reorganisation. They must also be able to secure written information on each of these points, and when they express a view, they must be guaranteed a response. Alongside this, the role of union branches was reinforced, with union delegates (greater in number and benefiting from paid training) able to inform the workers actually inside the work-place during working hours. It is also they who negotiate the plant-level agreements.

In West Germany, a series of statutes has been passed designed to reinforce the standing of the works councils and the rights of union men inside the plants. The SPD being in office has clearly eased the passage of the

relevant legislation, even though its alliance with the FDP may have limited any further reform directed towards more extensive *Mitbestimmung*.

It is certainly in Great Britain that the least progress has been made as regards institutionalisation at this level following the 1969-70 strikes. The Conservatives set about refurbishing the project on which Labour had come a cropper, the aim being especially to regulate disputes at the highest level by setting up the necessary machinery and labour tribunals and, as far as the plant level was concerned, restricting wild-cat strikes. Plant-level bargaining, for its part, was encouraged, though it had no greater formal basis than in the previous period. However, with the return of Labour to office in 1974, and its social contract with the TUC, a series of measures has been introduced which strengthen the position of the unions inside the plant (see Crouch in the companion volume, p. 247).

In each country the initial waves of strike action created the objective conditions for advancing some way towards institutionalising industrial conflict, and their effect has been to attenuate the previous weakness in the industrial relations systems at the level of individual undertakings. Paradoxically enough, they also created the objective conditions for increasingly radical industrial action – the reinforcement of procedures for institutionalising plant-level disputes contains the seeds of its own downfall. Thus it is at the very moment when the issue of updating the institutional framework of industrial conflict at the lowest level is being resolved that its very basis is questioned.

*The disavowal of conflict institutionalisation through radical trends in industrial disputes:* 'Progress' in the institutionalisation of industrial conflict does indeed go some way towards explaining an increasing radical tendency in dispute activity during the period following the initial waves of strikes, with more frequent recourse to out-and-out stoppages, concerted tactics aimed at disrupting production, the sequestration of management, work-place occupations, acts of violence, direct action and sometimes the complete takeover of production. Disputes no longer arise with a view to doing away with certain failings in the system, but call into question social peace as implied in such institutionalisation.

Where a heavy hand is used in imposing institutional machinery through repressive measures, the response is for disputes to take a radical turn. The sequence of repression and violence is sufficiently recurrent during stoppages to account for any escalation taking place. Beyond this, however, a nominally 'intelligent' use of institutionalisation may turn against itself. Where the union is recognised as a valid bargaining agent at plant level, this may indirectly enable workers to become better organised in disputes without any fear of being systematically stepped on. Negotiations over matters which were previously not considered to be bargaining issues (such as working conditions) may, where talks get bogged down, lead to forms of direct action being undertaken. The visible increase in the authority of joint bodies (of the works council type in European countries) encourages increasing awareness of their

shortcomings: any further supplementary consultative and watchdog powers, recognised by formal provisions, do not mean to say that the ultimate aim has been achieved, that of actual decision-making authority. In West Germany, where this system has gone the furthest, co-management has only the outward appearance of true bipartite control. In the supervisory councils in the mining and steel industries, the eleventh co-opted member more often than not goes along with the management. The law passed at the start of 1975 to extend co-management in German industry makes provision for a representative of white-collar staff among the employee delegates, the hope of management being that he will play the part of the 'eleventh man' and upset the balance of 'official' parity. Any reinforcement in the consultative role of joint bodies may thus be illusory. Increasing awareness of this could lead to demands backed by some measure of authority, but it may also provoke disputes of a more extreme nature, based on an underlying desire to promote radical change within society, the sole means of effectively overthrowing the power of the established ruling class.

The tendency towards radical dispute forms is not only underpinned by recent changes in institutionalising industrial conflict. It is also coupled with more radical ideological trends, both providing for these trends and itself being justified through them. The extent of these is of course a question of degree: it is widely agreed that some form of change should come about within society, on socialist or communist lines, though there is continuing disagreement as to how to accomplish the transition, whether by revolutionary means or through the electoral process. The more radical ideologies are voiced by student groups, though they are also advocated by certain sections of the working class. In all these countries, alongside a more or less steady process of combined trade-union action (as regards putting forward joint demands or common objectives for social change), there has been a drift leftwards; and inside central union bodies, individual unions or federations take up a more overtly left-wing stance. This is the case of engineering unions in Britain, Germany and Italy, together with the British transport workers and mining unions. In France, the CGT is completely behind the *programme commun*, the Left's election platform since 1972. The CFDT also aligned itself behind the programme in 1974, while it was at its 1970 national conference that this union adopted statutes which laid down principles based on the class struggle and declared itself for a society on socialist lines, with the three mainstays of social ownership of the means of production, *autogestion* and democratic planning. The Belgian FGTB, at its congress in 1971, took a firmer line on its attitude to worker control. A more radical trend in union ideology is certainly one of the consequences of the initial wave of stoppages in 1968-70, though of itself it serves as a frame of reference and a platform for radical dispute trends.

Not all hard-line disputes have an underlying theme of altering society. This could be the aim of the more spectacular disputes which are seized upon by the media, always on the lookout for anything out of the ordinary, and the effect may simply be catching. Where used to a strictly instrumental purpose, such disputes may be aimed at no more than sectoral gain. A particular work-

group, with a key position in the production process, may take advantage of the fact by resorting to radical dispute forms in order to improve its own situation, possibly at the expense of other sectors.

Further, the development of radical disputes may be explained by their relative effectiveness, at least initially. With the advantage of surprise, they enable better results to be obtained than in more conventional kinds of dispute.

Hence, the initial waves of strikes, in response to deficiencies in the institutionalisation of industrial conflict, have provoked on the one hand increasingly radical forms in subsequent disputes, and also further institutionalisation at plant level, which contains within it the seeds of its own downfall, and thus itself contributes to reinforcing these more radical tendencies.

#### NOTES

1. In addition to these sources, the present paper makes use of the results of a questionnaire on forms of conflict completed by participants in the project in all the countries concerned. Use has also been made of the following 'comparative studies'. Fisher 1974; Spitaels 1971, 1972; *Belgium. Contradictions* 1972, van Kerckhove 1973, Piret 1971; Spitaels 1967, 1972; *France: Dubois* 1974; Dubois and Durand 1975, Dubois *et al.* 1971; Touraine 1962, 1968; *Italy: Aglieta et al.* 1972; *Autogestion et Socialisme* 1974; Massari 1974; Quaderni Rossi 1968; *Rassegna Sindacale Quaderni* 1972; *Sociologie du Travail* 1971, *Les Temps Modernes* 1974; *United Kingdom: Charlot* 1972; Cornu 1973; Durcan and McCarthy 1974; Fox and Flanders 1969; Hyman 1972; *West Germany: Bergmann and Muller-Jentsch* 1974; Braec 1970, SOFI 1974.
2. There is no ready equivalent of this term in English. It refers to disputes affecting several different occupational and industrial groups. Common in France, Italy and elsewhere, they would probably be regarded as 'general strikes' in the UK [editor's note (C.J.C.)].
3. French statistics include a category ('conflicts involving several categories') which enables calculation of the importance of strikes at this level. In 1971-3 16.5 per cent of strike days were attributable to this source, against 5.5 per cent for the period 1963-70, in 1966-7 there was a preliminary rise in this kind of strike to 9.5 per cent.
4. Italian statistics distinguish strikes at factory level, sectoral level and going beyond sectoral level. In the period 1955-1967, 4.5 per cent of strike hours were attributable to this last type; in the following years it reached over 10 per cent and in 1968 stood at 35 per cent.
5. Except in Germany where the initial wave of unofficial wild-cat strikes in 1966-7 took place during the period of relative recession. These strikes were the result of the employers cutting back on advantages that had not been written into collective agreements.
6. The unchecked hypothesis that a young labour force means a more radical labour force may rest upon a series of points that are more or less well-founded: they rebel because they have already had experience of collective disputes in school, because they are influenced by extreme left-wing groups, they have not had their illusions shattered yet, they are taken on to do jobs below their actual skill level, they do not accept the disparity which exists between actual and potential standards of living, they reject a hierarchy that gives priority to seniority rather than merit, etc.
7. Strikes involving a majority of skilled workers (the OP - '*ouvriers professionnels*') are just as radical as those involving OS grades. But both these sorts of strike are more radical than stoppages by technical staff. Due to work organisation, these categories have a more 'individualistic' outlook and are more closely dependent upon the employer; their low level of unionisation has an opposite effect - rather than incite them to radicalise, it encourages discretion.

8. The rise in unofficial strike activity in fact started in 1968, before the Labour Government's project on industrial relations legislation, and to some extent lie behind the proposals. The strikes coming after the project was abandoned take on another dimension as described here.
9. For a discussion of developments at national level, see the paper in this volume by C. J. Crouch.

## 2 *Occupational Structure, Collective Organisation and Industrial Militancy*

RICHARD HYMAN

### INTRODUCTION

The growth of white-collar employment has been the most notable, and certainly the most often noted, feature of occupational change within late capitalism. For some two decades, non-manual employees have represented the largest single occupational category in the United States, and the general trend in Western Europe is clearly in this direction. Not suprisingly, the implications of this trend for the labour movement first attracted serious discussion in America: the decline in the traditional proletariat was widely regarded as a central cause of the stagnation and even decline in trade union membership after the late 1940s (e. g. Bell 1954). The premise of this analysis was often that non-manual workers did not possess, and could not be expected to acquire, the collectivist and/or anti-capitalist sentiments seen as the necessary inspiration of a viable labour movement. On occasion this line of argument has been developed to grandiose proportions as an explicit antithesis to the Marxian conception of the historic role of the working class. Thus Bell comments (1974:125-6) that

in the utopian visions of Marx and the socialist movement, the working class, made conscious of its fate by the conditions of struggle, was seen as the agency not only of industrial but of human emancipation. . . . Yet if one takes the industrial worker as the instrument of the future, or, more specifically, the factory worker as the symbol of the proletariat, then this vision is warped. For the paradoxical fact is that as one goes along the trajectory of industrialization – the increasing replacement of men by machines – one comes logically to the erosion of the industrial worker himself. In fact, by the end of the century the proportion of factory workers in the labor force may be as small as the proportion of farmers today. . . . Instead of the industrial worker, we see the dominance of the professional and technical class in the labor force – so much so that by 1980 it will be the

second largest occupational group in the society, and by the end of the century the largest.

In Europe a number of writers have identified similar trends in occupational structure, but have interpreted their significance quite differently. The thesis developed by Mallet (1963) and other French analysts contests any presupposition of inevitable conservatism and individualism among the expanding white-collar groups. While not proletarian in the traditional sense, they constitute nevertheless a 'new working class'. They are commonly subject to a fragmentation, compartmentalisation and routinisation of tasks; while in some cases in positions of authority over subordinate employee groups they are nevertheless themselves subject to coercive control which stems ultimately from their role as servants of capital; like the manual proletariat their fate is to produce exchange-values rather than use-values. But whereas the labour movement created by the 'old' working class was largely negative and defensive in character, oriented primarily towards the negotiation of improvements *within* capitalism, the objective situation of the 'new' creates more radical possibilities. For their education and professional training create expectations and understandings which clash with capitalist reality: the issue of *control* is more sensitively perceived, and the need expressed for a social order based on the rational and conscious formulation of economic priorities. Thus potentially, the expanding sectors of white-collar occupations may play a vanguard role within the labour movement.

According to many accounts, this thesis received substantiation from the role of technicians and *cadres* in the French struggles of May 1968. Touraine, for example, argues (1971:18) that:

one of the significant aspects of the May Movement is that it demonstrated that sensibility to the new themes of social conflict was not most pronounced in the most highly organized sectors of the working class. The railroad workers, dockers, and miners were not the ones who most clearly grasped its most radical objectives. The most radical and creative movements appeared in the economically advanced groups, the research agencies, the technicians with skills but no authority, and, of course, in the university community.

Garaudy (1970) makes the same point, likewise linking the involvement of white-collar groups to the extent to which qualitative demands (at times articulated as demands for self-management) were raised within the struggle. The French experience is thus employed as supporting evidence for an ambitious general theory. For Garaudy (1970:61, 197), 'with the great scientific and technological mutation, organized intelligence is gradually becoming the chief productive force; there has been a structural change in the manpower demanded by the economic system'. Most non-manual workers:

indeed the most characteristic part – are sellers of their intellectual labour

power and, as presaged by Marx, either direct or indirect producers of surplus-value. Included here are the engineers, technologists, research workers, and even a large proportion of the managerial *cadres* in the public and private sectors. They do not own their means of production and whatever their standard of living or their outlook – this last deriving from their social origins – their objective interests do not differ in *principle* from those of the working class.

The possibility exists, he insists, for a 'historic bloc' (in Gramsci's terms) in which skilled sections of the manual working class will play a key integrating role.

The problem of the more popular presentations of sociological interpretations of the implications of occupational change is their high level of generality. The evaluation of the world-historical significance of such change requires more concrete and systematic evidence than is commonly on offer. Thus Bell (1974:153–4) counters the neo-Marxian theories by arguing that such groups as engineers:

do not in the least identify themselves with the 'working class'. . . . What counts for the engineer is the maintenance of a 'professional status'. . . . Thus one finds today the paradox that 'educated labor' is caught between the extremes of bureaucratization and populism. If it is to resist the 'alienation' which threatens its achievement, it is more likely to assert the traditional professionalism (certainly on the ideological level) than go in either direction. To this extent, the phrase 'new working class' is simply a radical conceit.

Yet Bell's counter-assertion, like the initial thesis, involves ambitious generalisation from limited premises (as well as some rather crude dichotomies). The need is for greater specificity and sensitivity of analysis.

The objectives in this paper are to examine the 'state of the debate' as it affects, not only the broad general theses just outlined, but also the interpretation of more detailed occupational changes. Developments within the manual working class, as well as the growth of white-collar occupations, are discussed. It should be stressed that the concern is not with futurology but with those changes which have *already* occurred. For our present purposes, theories of the significance of changing occupational structures are to be assessed in terms of their plausibility as explanations of recent developments in labour organisation and industrial militancy; their credibility as pointers to the future is not directly at issue.

Each of the following sections commences with a brief summary of a specific aspect of recent occupational change; the intention is to present as uncontroversially as possible particular more or less 'objective' trends which are in most cases substantiated by official statistics. (There are indeed problems associated with the reliability of such statistics, the adequacy of the categories employed, and their comparability between countries. It is

impossible to pursue such issues here and – because the nature of the discussion is not particularly dependent on statistical precision – unnecessary.) Each section then proceeds to a critical survey of some influential interpretations and theories concerning the trends which have been outlined. A final section attempts to draw together some conclusions and to point the way for future research.

## CONTINUING URBANISATION AND INDUSTRIALISATION

At the most general level, the most obvious change in occupational structure in the six focal countries involves two related processes: a growth in the proportion of wage and salary earners in the occupied population, and a decline in the agricultural sector. These two developments are closely associated, for agriculture has traditionally represented the main location of unpaid family labour, and at the same time an important area of self-employment. In the early post-war years, farm-work involved larger numbers than industrial work in Italy, and also occupied a substantial proportion of the labour force in France and (to a lesser extent) Germany. While Italy remains the most highly agricultural of the six countries, in two decades the proportion of the labour force so engaged has fallen from 40 to 17 per cent; in France and Germany the rate of decline has been comparable. While agriculture after the war was far less significant in the Netherlands, Belgium and Britain, here too there has been a further decline.

The trend in the proportion of employees has run in parallel. In Italy, in 1954, only 55 per cent of the labour force were wage or salary earners; today the percentage is over 70. The percentage in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany was around 70 and in France somewhat lower; today the figure is 80 per cent or above. Britain has been exceptional in that, throughout the post-war period, the proportion of employees has been over 90 per cent and has scarcely altered; there has indeed been a slight decline in recent years.

These general processes indicate that, in at least three of the six countries, the historical development of urbanisation and industrialisation was far from complete only two decades ago, and until very recently at least has been of continuing importance. In Germany (at least until the last few years) and in Italy, there has been a considerable increase in the size of the industrial sector. Only in the three countries which were earliest the most highly industrialised – Britain, Belgium and the Netherlands – has there been a significant decline in the proportion of the labour force employed in industry (though not in the total numbers of industrial workers) – and then only roughly in the last decade. (Hence in Western Europe, talk of a ‘post-industrial’ society is perhaps a little premature. Whatever the probable trends of the 1980s and thereafter, the decline of industrialism cannot be identified as a source of the changes in patterns of conflict in Western Europe in recent years.)

Thus it is clear that the expansion of the *combined* demand for labour in the industrial and service sectors has been a characteristic of all the countries under consideration, though the pace of this expansion has varied. The extent to which this demand has been met by an influx from the agricultural sector (and the extent to which this influx has comprised rural wage-labour as against independent proprietors and their dependants) has been influenced by a number of factors: the initial size of the agricultural sector, its predominant relations of production, and the degree to which the rural economy has been sustained by such measures as subsidies and import restrictions. The two extreme cases are Britain, where the contraction of agriculture was already so far advanced by the post-war period that continuing internal migration has been of limited significance, clearly outweighed by immigration (mainly from the Commonwealth); and Italy, where the agricultural labour force was initially larger than that in industry, and has provided the major source of labour supply.

The broader issues concerning immigrant workers are discussed in Chapter 3; but it is important to note that *internal* migration, and in particular the influx to urban employment of workers with 'pre-capitalist' backgrounds, has important though often contradictory implications. The peasantry has in most countries been characterised as conservative and at times reactionary, a political stance deriving from immersion in individualistic relations of production (cf. Marx on the peasant basis of Bonapartism, Gramsci on the Southern question). Rural labourers whose situation involves isolation and social subordination commonly demonstrate similar conservatism and deference. Such attitudes may be carried into the urban labour force by workers with agricultural backgrounds, weakening the basis for collective organisation and action (a phenomenon noted by Engels in the context of workers with rural Irish backgrounds in the early period of British industrialisation). But conversely, habituation to non-industrial relations of production may form a basis for hostile reaction to industrial discipline and other aspects of urban and industrial life. A militant response to industrial working conditions has historically been common among newly established labour forces, whereas accommodation to the pressures of capitalist work discipline has often developed among a stable urban population. (The absence of such accommodation on the part of migrants may lead to 'unorganised' conflict – high labour turnover etc. – rather than collective militancy; though the one may be the precursor to the other, as in Italy in the 1960s.)

At a more general level, Leggett (1968) has identified the 'uprootedness' of rural migrants as a source of political radicalism and industrial militancy (though his analysis is complicated by the interaction of migratory and racial factors). In France, a somewhat similar conclusion has been drawn by Touraine and Ragazzi (1962). In Germany, by contrast, there is evidence that industrial workers with agricultural backgrounds adopt more conservative attitudes. Reviewing this question, Hamilton (1967) concludes that account must be taken of the specific character of different rural backgrounds: in some contexts, but not others, the structure of social relationships and

agricultural production generates a 'pre-radical' disposition which develops readily into militancy in an industrial situation. Conversely, Paci has stressed the need to take account of the social environment *entered* by internal migrants; he argues (1973:70) that the move to an urban milieu has

as its primary consequence that of making individuals *receptive* to new ideological and political orientations. But the specific content of the new orientations cannot be inferred solely from the character or the very fact of this mobility; it is at least as much influenced by the values historically prevalent in the social context in which the process of mobility unfolds. In this respect the social consequence of the mobility of workers of rural origin is perhaps more exactly *to sustain and reinforce, rather than to modify, the ideology already dominant among the urban working class* [emphasis in original].

Hence in Italy, he suggests, workers of agricultural origin have proved highly receptive to the traditional political values of the northern industrial cities.

In a number of respects, the position of rural migrants represents merely a variant of the general phenomenon of immigrant labour. There commonly exist the same problems in the form of cultural differences from the established labour force, frictions and conflicts stemming from the 'outsider' role, and lack of experience of the institutions and procedures of industrial work (including, in many cases, any familiarity with trade union action). In both cases, a key influence on the migrants' behaviour is the extent to which they define themselves as permanent members of the industrial working class, or alternatively anticipate a return to the region or country of origin. In Britain, for example, the differing expectations of Asian and West Indian immigrants have been identified as explanations of differing orientations to industrial relations (Brooks 1975). In the Italian case, the rapid contraction of the agricultural sector has excluded any realistic possibility of return by most rural migrants: they are necessarily committed to membership of the urban working class.

While there are similarities between the situations of internal migrants and immigrant labour in general, there are also important differences. The rural migrant speaks the same language as the established worker, has the same national identity, is not readily distinguishable by race or colour. It is thus possible to attain a degree of integration into the urban labour force scarcely attainable by the genuine immigrant yet still to retain features of the immigrant's attitude and outlook. This presumably helps explain the receptivity to urban working-class values emphasised by Paci in the case of Italian internal migrants. In seeking to summarise the implications of rapid mobility from agriculture to industry, the evidence scarcely permits confident generalisation: but it may be more than coincidence that Italy and France are the two countries of the six with the highest proportion of industrial workers with rural backgrounds, the most weakly institutionalised industrial relations, and the most dramatic movements of industrial militancy in recent years.

## SERVICE INDUSTRIES AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The thesis of the 'post-industrialisation' of society is based primarily on the growth of the tertiary or service sector of the economy, a trend the significance of which was emphasised over three decades ago (Clark 1940). In each of the six countries, employment in this sector as a proportion of the total labour force has expanded by roughly 10 per cent in the past two decades. The highest proportion is in the Netherlands, the lowest in Italy (57 and 39 per cent respectively); apart from the Netherlands, only in Britain and Belgium does the service sector account for over half the labour force (though in France it is larger than the industrial sector)..

Generalisation about the service sector is complicated by its heterogeneity: indeed its definition is often purely as a residual category, those areas of the economy not included within the agricultural/extractive/industrial sectors. Among the areas of employment included are: transport and communications; retail and wholesale distribution; finance, banking and insurance; public administration; education, health and other professional services; entertainment; hotels and restaurants. Proposals for a more refined classification have been made; for example, Foote and Hatt (1953) have suggested a division between tertiary (domestic and quasi-domestic services), quaternary (transport, commerce, finance and administration) and quinary sectors (medicine, education, research and recreation). They argue that these categories possess internal coherence: services in the quaternary sector 'facilitate or effectuate the division of labour', those in the quinary are concerned with the 'refinement and extension of human capacities'. These definitions appear however to owe much to functionalist ideology; in the absence of functionalist presuppositions the homogeneity of the three categories is far less obvious. Within each of the three service sectors, certainly, employment trends have displayed considerable variation: catering, transport and distribution, and recreation have not increased at the same rate as overall employment in the respective sectors (and in some countries, declines have been recorded).

The increase in service employment is closely associated with the growth in the public sector, which has been a feature in all six countries. In some cases the trend has been uneven, with an immediate post-war decline in national government employment with demobilisation and reductions in state controls over economic activity. (The apparent statistical trends may be affected by differences in the classification of the armed forces.) The most notable trend has however been the rapid expansion of medical services and education and research. As Foote and Hatt remark, 'investment in quinary industries . . . has to be predominantly public investment.' From a functionalist perspective, this may be interpreted as social investment in collective goods; from a Marxist viewpoint, it reflects the role of the state in assisting the *general* requirements of capitalist production (a healthy and educated labour force, fundamental scientific research) which private capital will not finance since

the gains cannot with certainty be appropriated. The growing involvement of governments in the planning and co-ordination of capitalist production has also contributed to the expansion of public administration. To varying degrees in different countries, the public sector has also been expanded by nationalisation: most notably in transport and communications, but in some cases including significant areas of productive and extractive industry. In certain instances such nationalisation is attributable to labour movement pressure, though the actual consequence (notable in Britain in the case of the coal, steel, railway and postal industries) is normally to provide private capital with important materials and services at below cost. France presents an apparent exception, with a *diminution* in the state's role as employer during the 1960s (Dubois 1974).

State employment (with the exception of nationalised goods-producing enterprises) is conventionally treated as part of the 'service sector'. The notion of 'public service' has obvious ideological undertones: the role of the state is taken at face value as catering directly and democratically to the express needs of the populace at large. The dissociation between state activity and capitalist interests is explicitly asserted in Bell's notion of 'the non-profit sector' (1974:147).

An alternative, Marxist perspective treats the growth of the state sector as a response of the need of contemporary capitalism to socialise an increasing proportion of costs (though not of course profits). As O'Connor comments (1973:241):

state workers . . . are nominally in the service of 'society', 'the public welfare', 'quality education', 'public health', and so forth – the words and phrases normally used to describe the functions of the state administration. However . . . , many service workers quickly learn that indirectly they serve private capital and that their jobs really consist of establishing the preconditions for profitable business, training 'human capital' rather than educating human beings, and exercising control over subject populations – especially in activities in which the incipient social-industrial complex has already begun to rationalize state programs.<sup>1</sup>

Collective organisation and action among state employees in western Europe appear to reveal three general characteristics. The level of unionisation is in most cases considerably higher than in the private sector; where union membership is strongest, the unions are commonly by tradition less militant than in the private sector; but in the last few years this tradition has been under growing strain.

The contrast in levels of unionisation between public and private sectors is clearly evident. In Belgium, the percentage of public employees organised is estimated at 80, as against a level of 65 per cent unionisation across the whole economy. In Britain the public sector proportion is similar, though only half the total labour force is unionised. In Germany about 70 per cent of public employees are organised (though partly in non-DGB affiliated associations);

the private sector proportion is far lower. In France, Crozier (1965) has estimated public sector unionisation at 40 per cent, as against only 15 per cent in the private sector. Three factors seem of particular importance in explaining this marked difference. The first is the size of the employer and the work unit: an influence discussed in the following section. The second is the degree of bureaucratisation in the organisation of work and the determination of conditions of employment: workers can hope to improve their situation significantly only by acting collectively. The third is the influence of employer recognition of trade unions (Bain 1970): in most countries it is made clear by legislation or by established government policy that union membership is acceptable or even encouraged.

The fact that union organisation in the public sector is partly the consequence of employer goodwill may help explain the absence of a militant tradition. In Britain, unionism in national and local government and in nationalised industries (except, perhaps, those with a tradition of militancy *before* nationalisation) has been markedly conciliatory by disposition. In Belgium, state employee unions have insisted (against the weight of legal opinion) that they possess the right to strike, but have shown little disposition to use this. In Germany, until the late 1960s, the ÖTV was a notably pacific union. France and Italy are perhaps exceptions to this tendency, with traditions of demonstration stoppages in the public sector, and occasional more protracted disputes. But here the level of unionisation, and the degree of employer acceptance, are far less (in France, indeed, the legal position in respect of the right to bargain is less favourable than in the private sector).<sup>2</sup>

The tradition of moderation among established public-employee unionism may reflect partly a fear of jeopardising accommodative employer policies, in some countries a sensitivity to legal restraints, and in addition a belief that there exist effective means of achieving improvements in members' conditions without militant action. Political pressure can be applied through lobbying, the cultivation of sympathetic parliamentary or council representatives, or possibly by direct association with a political party; attempts may be made to influence 'public opinion' (which, it is normally taken for granted, would be alienated by militancy) as a form of pressure on the employer. Many public employers have shown a willingness to reciprocate in order to ensure pacific labour relations. Employment security and the provision of 'fringe benefits' have in most countries been more favourable than in much of the private sector; in terms of pay, there has often been a willingness to match movements in wages and salaries negotiated (possibly after strike action) in the private sector. In Britain, such practice has long been formalised in the principle of 'fair comparisons'. Public-sector non-militancy has been sustained by aspects of employee consciousness enshrined in the unions themselves: acceptance of the ideology of 'public service', with the implication that strike action would be morally improper (a belief held in extreme form with respect to the German *Beamter*); and a lack of confidence in the workers' own power, precisely because their work is not directly productive.

The emergence of public sector militancy has been one of the most notable

features of recent years. In Germany, ÖTV members participated in the strikes of 1969 and 1973, and the union's official policies have become more combative. In Britain the trend has been particularly marked: since 1969 a series of disputes involved civil servants, school-teachers, local government officers and manual workers, nurses and health service ancillary workers: groups which in many cases had not previously had any strike experience. Conflicts have become more frequent in public utilities and other nationalised industries. The mining industry presents the extreme example: a post-war history of small-scale militancy but no major conflict, but from 1969 a succession of larger-scale actions culminating in the national strikes of 1972 and 1974, easily the biggest stoppages in British post-war history.

A number of explanations are commonly suggested for this trend in public sector militancy. The traditional advantages associated with many forms of public sector employment have been reversed or eliminated. The employment security of the 'public servant' appears less important in the post-war labour market;<sup>3</sup> fringe benefits in many private companies are becoming equally or even more advantageous; the very expansion of the public sector has tended to dilute any elevated social status associated with such employment; while opportunities are far less than in the private sector to boost earnings through bonus systems. Hence a new generation of public employees tends to view work as a job like any other, to be evaluated by similar criteria and improved by similar methods. Such long-term trends converge with more acute problems affecting state and local government employment: the growing financial stringencies confronting public authorities. These could often treat employees relatively favourably when the state sector was small; the pressures to enforce the normal conditions of capitalist wage-labour intensify as state employment becomes more central to capitalist development and the burden of local and national taxation grows. General economic malaise clearly accentuates these pressures (Jackson *et al.* 1972; O'Connor 1973). Consequential efforts to restrict wage increases and to apply the 'rationalised' work methods and disciplines typical of private capitalism have been viewed as key factors underlying the increased militancy of the ÖTV in Germany (Körber 1972). Similar considerations have applied in Britain; their impact has been closely associated with the development of government incomes policies. The Prices and Incomes Board of 1965-70 encouraged the introduction of more intensive work techniques in the public sector, and also overturned the principle of 'fair comparisons' as a source of conflict-free pay determination (Hyman 1973). The Conservative government of 1970-4 continued the attempt to make its own employees an example in the imposition of wage restraint. In France too, the public sector has been held back by comparison with private industry (Dubois 1974). Added to these immediate sources of material discontent (and attempting to feed their own criticisms into the resulting unrest), a significant minority of employees have begun to challenge the increasingly obvious capitalist orientation of their own work, and to demand that the notion of 'public service' should be made genuinely relevant. In the British health service, for example, militancy over

pay grievances has developed into direct action against the use by consultants of public facilities for private practice.

The situation in public employment differs in important respects from the private service sector. Here, a diversity of situations gives rise to a parallel divergency in the character and extent of collective organisation and action. The personal service trades (catering, retail distribution etc.) are often highly competitive, involving a multiplicity of small-scale units; self-employment provides a significant proportion of the labour force; employment is often part-time and relatively casual or with a high rate of turnover (and, a factor partly associated, largely female). In general, trade unionism is relatively weak and there is little evidence of organised militancy. In large department stores there exists concentrated employment, and much of the work is often 'rationalised' and mechanised, giving a work situation not dissimilar to some factory employment. There have been significant examples of strike action in such stores in France and Italy (though not, it would seem, of stable trade union organisation); such militancy does not appear to have occurred in the other countries under review. In the private transport sector there is commonly a close association with manufacturing industry, and trade union experience tends to match the general industrial pattern. Financial services have historically been imbued with a powerful capitalist-individualist ethos which has inhibited collective organisation among employees; but changes in the organisation of employment (greater bureaucratisation, a higher proportion of routine occupations, erosion of advantages in terms of salary differentials and fringe benefits) have been associated in some cases with the growth of unionism and militant action. Thus in Britain, there has been a substantial growth in membership of NUBE at the expense of the employer-sponsored bank staff associations, and since 1967 the use of strike action. The case of the established professions may finally be noted. Traditionally they have successfully applied the methods of unilateral control of work conditions historically associated with entrenched craft unionism, while totally rejecting the ideology of trade unionism in favour of that of professional autonomy; privileged access to state power has provided a potent source of occupational control (Johnson 1972). The growing interdependence between many such professions and the state (even though the forms of self-employment may be retained) has at times led to instances of collective action scarcely distinguishable from the strike.

## THE SIZE OF EMPLOYING UNITS

The general tendency in the post-war period has been an increase in the average size of employing units. To an important degree, this is a reflection of the decline in agricultural employment. This has been partly offset, however, by the fact that employing units in the service sector are often small (though most notably, perhaps, in the *declining* areas of retail distribution). Within industry proper, there has been a tendency towards increasing size: though in

France, as the national paper remarks (see the companion volume to this work [Dubois *et al.*, p. 57]), this has not noticeably occurred. The variations in average size of manufacturing establishments is considerable: a 1966 survey of EEC countries showed that concentration was greatest in Germany, with over a third of manufacturing employment in establishments with a work force of over a thousand; in the Netherlands, at the other extreme, the proportion was only one in five.

Evidence from a wide range of studies suggests the existence of a 'size effect' on workers' behaviour. Rates of absenteeism, accidents and labour turnover are on average significantly higher in large than in small employing organisations (Ingham 1970). Attitude surveys reveal a tendency for expressed job satisfaction to decline as size increases. Size also appears to be related to the more general character of industrial relations. Workers in large establishments typically have the highest incidence of strike action, are more extensively implicated in collective bargaining machinery, and appear generally to display the strongest orientation towards collectivism. Thus British evidence indicates that, in larger establishments, the level of unionisation is higher than average, shop-steward organisation more highly developed, and work-place bargaining more extensive and more militant (Government Social Survey 1968). In France, union membership is proportionately far higher in large establishments than in small, and left-wing political sympathies are significantly more prevalent (Adam *et al.* 1970). The rate of implementation of the 1968 legislation on French work-place union organisation is also markedly affected by plant size: the proportion of plants with over 1000 employees which possess such organisation is three times that in plants with under 150 employees.

A common explanation of such findings is that large-scale units are characteristically the most commonly associated with 'rationalised' methods of work and organisation of the division of labour. In large establishments the levels of the managerial hierarchy are more numerous than in the small work-place: hence company decision-making is more remote, and managerial practice often highly bureaucratic. This problem is accentuated in the multi-plant company, when key decision-making authority may be located outside the work-place altogether. Hence it is commonly suggested both that the intensity of employee grievances is likely to increase with the size of the work-place; and that the possibilities of improvement become more circumscribed. Workers in small firms may be able to achieve redress of grievances through personal and informal approaches to senior management; such channels are likely to be closed in large establishments, necessitating militant collective action. Thus an increase in the size of employing units may be viewed as a probable cause of increased industrial conflict.

Ingham (1970) has criticised some of the more simplistic attempts to link organisational size with worker discontent and militancy (theories which on occasion appear to replicate the familiar *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* dichotomy). In larger firms, he argues, rates of pay are usually above average; and workers may willingly accept a trade-off between high earnings and the more

disadvantageous features of such employment. Indeed, he suggests, they may consciously seek work in large establishments because they value monetary rewards above intrinsic job satisfaction; and if this is so, their position need not engender militancy. Ingham's argument has many affinities with the 'instrumental worker' thesis of Goldthorpe *et al.* (1968), and is open to similar objections. Daniel (1969:367) points to: 'strong evidence to the effect that the factors that attract a person to a job are very different from those that determine his satisfactions, performance and behaviour on the job. These in their turn are often very different from those that predispose him to leave the job.' Thus even among those who choose 'instrumentally' to work in large, bureaucratic establishments, discontent over conditions of work may in certain situations become salient. Also relevant is Westergaard's comment (1970) that any dissatisfaction among such employees with their pay levels may well spill over into generalised discontent. If the worker 'is tied to his work only by the size, security and potential growth of his wage packet . . . his commitment clearly is a brittle one.' In the absence of personalised or normative commitment to the employer, employee attitudes in larger firms may be expected to show volatility in the face of changes in the work situation or of sentiments of relative deprivation in respect of earnings. And moreover, the *trend* towards increased enterprise size, in so far as it involves mergers and take-overs, carries with it the threat and the actuality of closures and redundancies which are a stimulus to collective organisation and a source of conflict. There is also evidence that mergers, when carried through without serious redundancy, nevertheless have significant industrial relations implications: managements may seek to standardise previously disparate practices; workers often pursue comparisons in terms of wages and conditions which were not previously salient. The outcome is often an increase in conflict.

## THE DECLINE OF TRADITIONAL INDUSTRIES

Certain developments at times identified as modes of 'post-industrialisation' may more appropriately be interpreted as changes *within* the industrial sector. In a range of industries dating from the industrial revolution – textiles, coal-mining, iron and steel, shipbuilding – and in associated service industries – railways, the docks – the level of activity has declined, or at least less labour-intensive methods have been introduced, leading often to drastic reductions in employment. To give one example: the coal-mining industry employed roughly 6 per cent of the Belgian labour force in the immediate post-war period, but the proportion has now fallen to 1 per cent. Such shrinkage represents in most cases the continuation of the trend visible throughout most of the present century (and in some instances temporarily reversed in wartime). Within traditional industries, stability or growth overall often represents the decline of old sections and the rise of new: for example, the contraction of heavy engineering and the expansion of motor vehicles, consumer durables and electronics. More generally, it is the growth of

technically sophisticated industries, counterbalancing the decline of the old, which has damped 'post-industrialising' tendencies in the industrially established countries of western Europe.

The decline of traditionally staple industries has both specific implications in terms of the occurrence of closure and redundancy—discussed in a later section—and more general ones in terms of union policy and working-class consciousness. These may in turn be regarded in respect of their impact in the industries concerned, and on working-class organisation and action as a totality.

Within the industries specifically affected, two contradictory effects might *a priori* be expected. On the one hand, instability and insecurity might generate discontent and militancy, perhaps involving a radical questioning of the economic system. But conversely, a disposition might be encouraged towards collaboration with the employers, in order to improve the industry's economic performance and hence minimise the rate of decline. Which tendency predominates may well depend on the degree of institutionalisation existing in industrial relations. The British coal-mining industry provides a clear example of the effect of a highly institutionalised relationship between the NUM, nationalised management and the government. The principle of the contraction which commenced in the early 1950s was not seriously challenged: instead, union policy focused on boosting productivity and negotiating the rate of pit closures and the terms of compensation and resettlement for those made redundant.

It is often argued that the decline of such traditional strongholds of (often militant) trade unionism as mining, shipbuilding, textiles, railways and docks—often associated with the destruction of homogeneous working-class residential communities—has important general significance. The notion of the 'isolated mass', developed by Kerr and Siegel (1954), has exerted considerable influence: it is suggested that geographical or social isolation of specific industrial groups creates a mutual reinforcement of grievances and an insulation from normative pressures towards industrial peace. In consequence, groups which form distinctive occupational communities are commonly viewed as particularly favourable bases for solidarism, industrial militancy and political radicalism; it is often added that orientations nurtured within such industries have inspired cohesion and radicalism within the broader labour movement. The corollary of such interpretations is that as the significance of traditional industrial communities declines, so the character of the labour movement as a whole becomes diluted: the overall level of unionism declines, while its policies become more accommodated to the values and requirements of capitalist society.

This thesis acquired most extensive influence in the 1950s, when in many countries the level of unionisation stagnated or even declined; when strike activity diminished; and when conservative governments appeared established in office with the support of a considerable proportion of working-class votes. Events since then have provided a practical refutation: it is no longer possible to argue seriously in support of the notions of the 'deradicalised'

working class or the 'withering away of the strike'.

Westergaard (1965:107) has argued that the exclusive identification of radicalism and militancy with the isolated working-class community involves a central fallacy. The necessary premise, he claims, is 'an assumption that the kind of working class unity which finds expression in industrial, or more especially in political, action draws its nourishment from the simpler and more intimate loyalties of neighbourhood and kin. Consequently, it is postulated, as the latter are weakened so the former declines.' His argument is that, on the contrary, class solidarity cannot be founded upon 'the kind of parochial solidarity that is its very antithesis'. Thus while broader unification may in some contexts develop out of more parochial identifications and loyalties, this has occurred historically only when the *isolation* of the sectional group has been transcended – otherwise sectional militancy fails to constitute *class* struggle. This argument contains clear parallels with the analysis by Touraine (1966:321--2) of 'proletarian consciousness' typical of such industries as coal-mining: an essentially negative and parochial spirit of opposition; lacking a conception of his own place in the totality of society, and a positive objective of an alternative system of organisation, the traditional 'proletarian' cannot generate a movement of genuinely hegemonic class action.

It would clearly be quite wrong to deny a causal relationship between collectivism and militancy on the one hand and traditional, tight-knit proletarian groupings on the other. The notion of the 'isolated mass' is a plausible explanation of the almost universal strike-proneness of such occupational groups as miners and dockers; it may also explain the *disposition* towards militancy in such industries as steel and textiles (though the fact that experience in these industries is far from uniform suggests that other social factors may either reinforce or else counteract the influences analysed by Kerr and Siegel).

It is safe to conclude that the decline of certain traditional industries may indeed entail the reduction of a particular type of working-class organisation, consciousness and action. But no *general* conclusions can be drawn concerning the implications for working-class militancy and radicalism, unless it is assumed that *only* the traditional working-class communities provide the necessary basis for intensive and combative collective organisation. This clearly cannot be assumed *a priori*. It follows that any serious appraisal of the effects of changes in industrial structure must consider the character not only of the old, but also the new sections of the working class.

## OCCUPATIONAL CHANGE WITHIN THE MANUAL WORKING CLASS

The decline in employment in some industries and expansion of others, as well as the growth of the service sector, generate alterations in the skill patterns of occupations. A common, if fairly crude, generalisation is that the staple

industries of the nineteenth century employed high proportions of craftsmen with extensive skills and also high proportions of virtually unskilled labourers; that the introduction of mass-production technology and the spread of 'scientific management' principles caused a decline in both categories, with the expansion of intermediate categories of semi-skilled production workers; while the most modern forms of technology continue this process, yet require capacities from the production workers which though not equivalent to traditional craft skills are nevertheless greater than those of the average semi-skilled machine-operator.

Even if the relationship between industrial and occupational structure were this simple, occupational change would be complicated by the complexities already noted in industrial development. Hence it is difficult to interpret the significance of statistics such as those collected in EEC countries in 1966, which show that among manual workers in the manufacturing, extractive and construction industries, the skilled proportion ranged from 36 per cent in Belgium and Italy to 43 per cent in Germany, and the semi-skilled from 28 per cent in Belgium to 36 per cent in Italy and the Netherlands. Are such concepts as skilled/semi-skilled/unskilled, *qualifié/spécialisé/manoeuvre*, *qualifiziert/halb-qualifiziert/nicht qualifiziert* equivalents, or do they contain cultural differences? Are their meanings stable over time, and uniformly applied even in a single country at a single point of time? The crudity of conventional skill classifications, in an era when traditionally rigid occupational boundaries are being eroded, undermines the reliability of such statistical comparisons.<sup>4</sup> The objectivity of occupational classification is further contaminated by the fact that this is itself a bargaining issue, a reflection of the balance of power within production. Traditionally, it could be argued, the craft status of specific occupations often reflected organised sectional power as well as technical skill and expertise (Turner 1962); today, pressure (either piecemeal or concerted) for the enhanced grading of mass-production occupations is a common trade-union practice. Thus the type of statistic quoted above may reflect variations in trade union influence rather than in the technical structure of jobs.

A sophisticated and widely cited (though at times criticised) attempt to adapt occupational categorisation to the complexity of industrial change is provided by Kern and Schumann (1970). Technological development is assessed according to a number of criteria: the extent of integration of the productive process; the handling of materials and finished products; organisation of the work process; control and monitoring of the work process; modification and correction of the work process. Technology is classified according to the degree to which direct human intervention is eliminated. Kern and Schumann set out eight levels of mechanisation falling within three broad stages of development. 'Pre-mechanisation' comprises simple hand-work and assembly-line production, where the worker directly executes the tasks of production. 'Mechanisation' includes single-purpose machine tools, multi-purpose machines with or without constant operator servicing, and transfer machines; the operator does not directly carry out the work of

production, but controls the production process. Under 'automation' – which comprises the partial automation of machine tools and of transfer machines (and a hypothetical ninth level of complete automation) – the worker no longer controls the normal course of production, but merely intervenes to alter programmes or correct malfunctioning. Kern and Schumann specify the types of work associated with each level of mechanisation (fifteen categories in all), analysed in terms of task content, autonomy, qualifications and aptitudes, intensity of work, and social interaction in the work situation. They argue that autonomy and qualifications, which are high under skilled hand-work but low in the early stages of mechanisation, tend to become once more high as automation progresses; the intensity of labour shows a parallel but inverse trend; while the development of interaction follows a complex path.<sup>5</sup>

This is not the context to discuss in detail the problems of occupational classification. There are however three points which require emphasis. The first is that the most technologically advanced industries remain as yet a relatively minor sector of the economy. Whatever their implications for the future, it is improbable that the disposition of the labour movement in general in the recent past can be explained primarily in terms of factors peculiar to these industries. Secondly, the new forms of skill generated in these industries possess contradictory characteristics. On the one hand, the aptitudes and experience which are necessary in the qualified worker are to a large degree employer-specific, and certainly industry-specific; whereas the hallmark of most traditional craft skills was their transferability between employers and between industries.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, a major requirement of the qualified production worker in technologically dynamic industries – particularly at the level where the line between manual and non-manual occupations is blurred – is a *flexible* competence, an adaptability to new techniques and processes; whereas traditional craft skill was rooted in custom and continuity. This combination of flexibility with immobility is likely to be reflected in contradictory implications in terms of workers' consciousness. Third, despite some romantic notions to the contrary, advanced technology as applied within contemporary capitalism by no means eliminates unskilled manual labour: there remain significant areas of production which can most profitably be carried out labour-intensively. A possible consequence is the development of distinctive strata within a firm's labour force: those with expertise which gives their labour power a distinctive value to the employer; and those carrying out routine labouring tasks who are readily replaceable. Unless workers in the former category are normally recruited by promotion from the latter, a 'dual labour market' will exist (Doeringer and Piore 1971), with a tendency for workers in the inferior jobs to be recruited among socially oppressed groups. Specific recruitment and promotion procedures can thus create a link between occupational structure and the problem of 'marginal workers'; it is not merely a question of technical determinism.

The trends discussed here involve two distinct types of tendency: the simple mechanisation of production, a process dating back to the last century, which involves the growth of semi-skilled labour at the expense of both skilled and

unskilled; and the relatively recent development of more complex forms of mechanisation, semi-automation, and process technology, demanding a variety of novel categories of worker, some of whom must possess extensive training or experience though not a traditional apprenticeship.

The implications of the decline in traditional craft groups are not clear-cut, for the role of these groups in their period of dominance within the working class is itself the subject of dispute. On the one hand they have been characterised as the vanguard of the class, the first groups to form effective trade unionism and often disproportionately represented in radical political movements. On the other they have been regarded as a sectionally motivated aristocracy of labour, obstructive of class unity and collaborative towards employers and the state. The reality is perhaps more complex. Possessing unusual literacy and education, self-confidence and organisational cohesion, craftsmen have historically often played a leading role within the working-class movement. But the character of this role has varied according to the social, economic and technical context. Skilled workers who have succeeded in establishing stable and effective unions by their own exclusive strength have commonly pursued sectional and divisive industrial demands (Turner 1962). The 'workers' control' exercised by such unions has normally been of a conservative and individualistic kind (Goodrich 1975). Where political rights have been accorded to the advantaged sections of the working class (and these alone), craftsmen have often welcomed integration into the established political structure. But where powerful ruling-class opposition has confronted *all* movements for working-class political rights and industrial organisation, skilled workers have often displayed militancy and radicalism in leading struggles of the whole class.

It must be added that in modern conditions, the general pressures towards craft radicalism are reduced. A qualification is however necessary: when craft status is itself under attack, the consequences have historically often been explosive. In the 1914-18 war skilled engineers, faced by a systematic assault on their traditional job control and associated privileges, spearheaded the rise of the shop stewards' movement. A 'subversive potential', comments Hinton (1973), had been contained within the practice of craft control, resisting as this did the capitalist principles of subdivision of labour, separation of the planning and execution of work, and the 'rational' enforcement of managerial authority. Arguably, the contemporary role of *stable* craft groups tends predominantly to be conservative and divisive, and a continued decline in the proportion of such workers may create a greater potential for unified working-class action; while the actual *erosion* of the status of craft groups may itself provide an impetus to radicalism.

Paradoxically, any decline in the role of the wholly unskilled labourer may have similar implications. Lumpenproletarian groups have historically proved volatile and often conservative in their social and political attitudes; they have rarely provided a favourable basis for stable collective organisation. (Movements among apparently unskilled labourers – such as the British 'new unionism' of the late nineteenth century – have typically involved occu-

pations with distinctive though not generally recognised expertise and market value.) Any trend towards a more educated labour force, containing a higher proportion with some minimum of job qualifications, is likely to facilitate the development of consciousness and organisation.

The role of semi-skilled production workers – machine-operators, assembly-line workers – is more controversial. Conventionally, and often simplistically, they are regarded as the paradigm of the contemporary alienated worker, the main basis of collective organisation and industrial militancy. This conception is contested by Touraine (1966:322–3), whose research indicates only weak scores on a variety of indicators of class consciousness. The semi-skilled worker, he argues, displays only wage-militancy, conflict with the employer for increasing material rewards; there is no participation in a *class* movement oriented to changing the *status* of the worker. There are parallels with the notion developed by Goldthorpe *et al.* (1968 and 1969) of the ‘instrumental worker’. The prototypical semi-skilled production worker, they argue, experiences no significant intrinsic attachment to his work, regards employment merely as a necessary evil sustaining the standard of living to which he aspires in his domestic life, and is conscious of few ties of solidarity outside the immediate work-place.

It is significant that much of the research supporting the thesis of the deradicalised production worker was conducted in a period of relatively stable consumer capitalism. Workloads were not a serious focus of dispute; closures and redundancies were not a significant problem in the industries examined. (Thus experience of unemployment was negligible among the workers surveyed by Goldthorpe *et al.*) In less stable situations, the notion of ‘instrumentalism’ fails to indicate the type of conflicts which can derive from even wage-oriented trade unionism *irrespective* of the subjective intentions of trade unionists (and it could be argued that this consciousness involves more complex and contradictory facets than the notion of instrumentalism recognises: see for example Westergaard 1970). Economic instability puts employment itself at risk: wages can be protected only through demands and action which transcend mere wage-bargaining. The pursuit of higher pay, in a context of government (and employer) attempts to contain labour costs, throws into relief the question of the *relative* advantages of different employee groups. (Even in more stable economic conditions, both factors were important sources of conflict in the British car industry: see Turner *et al.* 1967.) Finally, the employer strategy designed to cut labour costs through more intensive work pressure necessarily disrupts the established ‘effort bargain’ and generates conflict over working conditions and the control of production. If semi-skilled production workers played a minor role in May 1968 in France, they have figured more prominently in subsequent militancy – and in disputes which often appear to go far beyond mere wage-consciousness. This is evident in a number of British stoppages (see for example the analysis of the Ford struggles by Beynon 1973); in Germany (the key role of the lower-skilled in the 1973 strikes, in sharp contrast to 1969); in France itself (the pursuit of egalitarian demands in 1972–3); in Belgium and the Netherlands (the

increasing militancy since 1969 being concentrated in traditional sectors of industry); and most notably of all in Italy (the upsurge of unionisation, workplace organisation and conflict activity, particularly in the car industry, associated with demands for humanisation of work and more egalitarian payment). In all these countries, events seem to have provided a significant reinforcement of the insistence by Westergaard (1970:121) on 'the precariousness of the balance between attitudes of co-operation and "societal resignation", on the one hand, and on the other hand those conflicting attitudes involving a generalized social discontent which may be released once the single-stranded "cash orientation" becomes strained or broken'.

Recent experience has indeed encouraged a totally contrary interpretation, discussed for example by Paci (1973:ch. 8), and adopted by some contributors to the present volume and its companion: that the growing concentration of relatively homogeneous, non-skilled mass-production workers is itself a major cause of increased militancy in recent years and of the emergence of 'new demands'. Yet the premise of this thesis is somewhat questionable, if what is involved is an assertion of a significant recent decline in the skill content of production work. Paci (1973: 223-5) himself cites statistics indicating an *increase* in the proportion of skilled workers in Italian industry during the 1960s; for the reasons already noted it is unwise to place excessive credence on such figures, but they clearly do not support the argument that recent combativity reflects 'de-skilling'. The erosion of established qualifications is no new phenomenon: it is on the contrary inseparable from the process of capitalist development. The most notable example of this erosion was indeed the spread over half a century ago of Taylorism and Fordism – described by Gramsci (1971:302) as 'the biggest collective effort to date to create, with unprecedented speed, and with a consciousness of purpose unmatched in history, a new type of worker and of man'. These phenomena, he added, were 'not original or novel: they represent simply the most recent phase of a long process which began with industrialism itself'.

There is little basis for suggesting that trends in the skill composition of production work in the recent past have been of comparable magnitude to those of previous periods of radical technological and organisational change. It could be argued that the *intensity* of production work has increased sharply in recent years, through speed-up and other forms of 'rationalisation', provoking heightened militancy. Certainly there is evidence – though far from conclusive – to support such an interpretation. But this is *not* to argue that the skill content of production work has altered radically. What is at issue, rather, is the manner in which developments in the character of tasks and the organisation of work – often involving more complex and contradictory features than the simple notion of 'de-skilling' implies – are subjectively perceived and socially mediated. It could be argued that a new generation of non-skilled factory workers, better educated than their predecessors and with higher expectations,<sup>7</sup> has been disposed to react with unwonted hostility to emotionally and psychologically stultifying yet

physically enervating work.<sup>8</sup> The distinct though gradual increase in structural unemployment, coupled with the recessionary character of the recent economic conjuncture, has limited the scope for *individualistic* solutions to work grievances *via* labour turnover and hence may have encouraged collective militancy. Thus there could be good reasons for anticipating increased combativity among unskilled and semi-skilled factory workers, even in the absence of significant changes in work content.

Interpretation of those changes which have occurred is complicated, moreover, by the extent to which affinities or contrasts in skill level among different occupational groups are overlaid by other lines of demarcation within the working class: in terms of sex, race, or social and geographical origins. Subjective identification of status within the skill hierarchy owes much to such non-technical factors: the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the labour force cannot be specified by task content alone. The relationship of workers to an objective job situation (the character of tasks, conditions of work and nature of managerial control) is also, it may be assumed, coloured by such factors as political and trade-union ideologies and traditions. All this is to suggest that it is insufficient to analyse recent trends in the organisation and action of the working class solely or even predominantly in terms of its changing skill composition.

This point is of key importance when assessing the hypothesis of a structural link between 'new demands' and 'mass workers' in recent conflicts (see Chapters 3 and 6). It is noteworthy that the evidence for such a link is drawn primarily from experience in certain sectors of Italy (from 1968 to 1969), Germany (notably 1973) and to some extent France. In the remaining countries the case for such an interpretation is far weaker; and even in the three countries cited, it is far from clear that the *overall* trends in strike demands and groups implicated supports the hypothesis. Thus in France, Durand and Dubois (1975) insist that the general pattern of demands has scarcely altered during recent years.

In explaining why 'mass workers' have been prominent in pressing 'new demands' *in specific and limited contexts*, it seems essential to emphasise contrasts in the industrial relations background. In Belgium, Britain and the Netherlands there has been a relatively high level of unionisation in manufacturing industry during the post-war period; and lower-skilled production workers have been more or less effectively integrated into the structure of collective bargaining. Indeed Turner (1952) has argued, in the British context, that such 'mass' unionism has tended to represent particularly the interests of the lower-skilled majority by tending to a reduction in percentage differentials. The institutional background helps explain why recent militancy in these countries has not characteristically taken the form of a revolt by the lower-paid against the privileges of the skilled minority; unofficial militancy has reflected the *general* inadequacy of the formal machinery to meet rank-and-file aspirations, rather than the disaffection of specific groups.

By contrast, in France, Italy and Germany the general level of unionisation has been relatively low for much of the post-war period, and organisation

among the lower-skilled particularly weak. In France and Italy, unionism has been weakened by sectarian division; the largest organisations, the CGT and CGIL, have possessed a small formal membership composed predominantly of a politically sophisticated skilled vanguard. German unionism, with a stronger and more stable membership base, has articulated the specific interests of the relatively privileged (native male) strata of the labour force; the lower-skilled have been minimally represented in the works councils or in the recent growth of shop-steward organisation. In these countries, then, recent militancy has often involved the radicalism of groups *not effectively represented in established processes of collective bargaining* and hence not institutionally inhibited from pressing demands which are not easily negotiable. As Durand and Dubois suggest (1975:364), 'problems associated with hierarchy, authority and the organisation of work are outside the accepted areas of negotiation'. One possibility is that the recent militancy of 'mass workers' in Italy, France and Germany may lead to their closer integration into the institutions of collective bargaining (though the trends so far in each country have been significantly different) and hence discourage the repetition of the type of conflict which has recently occurred.

The final manual occupational group much discussed in recent analyses of occupational change are process workers and similar groups whose work involves monitoring and where necessary correcting the operation of largely automatic production systems. One of the first attempts to discern fundamental significance in the changes in manual labour in technologically advanced industry was that of Blauner, who argues (1964:182) that 'automation increases the worker's control over his work process and checks further division of labor and growth of large factories. The result is meaningful work in a more cohesive, integrated industrial climate.' The industrial relations implication, not spelt out by Blauner, is that such workers will be more integrated into the company, less interested in trade unionism, and certainly less militant. The *converse* has been argued by those French theorists who see in the technologically advanced industries the source of a *syndicalisme gestionnaire* which poses a more positive and coherent challenge to capitalism than does traditional union militancy. Since most such theories relate not merely to manual process workers but also to technicians and operating managers (and indeed the very distinction between manual and non-manual occupations becomes blurred in such industries) they will be discussed below in the context of more general issues concerning white-collar employees. At this point, though, it is necessary to warn against romantic exaggerations of the transformation in the character of manual labour through advanced technology. Durand comments (in Dubois *et al.* 1971) that automated enterprises still contain semi-skilled occupations with work as alienating as a conventional assembly line. And Kern and Schumann (1970) specify in detail the varying alterations in work content associated with transfer systems and semi-automated technology: while some new occupations provide enhanced autonomy and control and permit greater employee identification with the job, with others the consequences are the reverse. A technically trained

manual labour force is only one, not necessarily predominant, product of technologically advanced industry.

## THE GROWTH OF WHITE-COLLAR EMPLOYMENT

The most frequently remarked occupational change is undoubtedly the rise in white-collar employment. The current American situation, in which non-manual workers constitute the largest occupational category, has not yet been reached in Europe: but the trend in this direction is rapid. In France, *professions libres, cadres et employés* increased from 24 per cent of the labour force in 1962 to 30 per cent in 1968. In Italy, *dirigenti e impiegati* rose from 9 per cent in 1954 to 14 per cent in 1963 and 20 per cent in 1973. In Germany, *Beamter und Angestellter* rose from 30 per cent in 1962 to 40 per cent in 1972. In Britain, professional and technical, administrative and managerial, and clerical employees rose from 21 per cent of the labour force in 1951 to 24 per cent in 1961 and 33 per cent in 1971.<sup>9</sup> In France and Italy, the proportions of *ouvriers* and *operai e assimilati* also increased (because of the fall in the agricultural labour force, with a high proportion of self-employed and family workers); but elsewhere the rise in white-collar labour has involved a corresponding proportionate (or even absolute) decline in manual employment.

One problem in interpreting these trends is the considerable heterogeneity of the non-manual stratum. Bain and Price (1972), seeking a precise definition of white-collar employment, conclude that no one unambiguous criterion exists. To an important extent, the manual/non-manual borderline is the product of social convention which may vary over time and between countries. Are the notions of white-collar/*Angestellter/employés/impiegati* precise equivalents? In Britain, for example, shop assistants are conventionally classed as white-collar: is this practice uniform? To complicate matters further, in English the distinctions manual/non-manual and blue-collar/white-collar are normally used interchangeably, though it is unclear whether their meanings are precisely identical.

For the purpose of a number of influential theorists, a key feature of the growth in white-collar employment is the spread of technical occupations, and the development of positions involving control over production without a central role in the managerial authority structure. As with many of the trends already discussed, such writers emphasise a development which is likely to assume increasing importance in the future but has not as yet made a profound mark on the occupational structure. In France, in 1968, *cadres moyens* (including technicians) formed 9 per cent of the labour force, and professional engineers only 1 per cent. In Germany, in 1970, engineers, technicians and technical specialists together formed 5 per cent of the labour force. In Britain, in 1971, lower professional and technical employees amounted to 7 per cent of the occupied population. In each of the six countries, clerical workers comprised the largest white-collar occupational

group, in most cases constituting roughly half the non-manual employment (excluding sales workers).

The social and industrial orientations of white-collar employees are the focus of most intense sociological controversy. One approach – according closely with the categories of everyday discussion – emphasises the distinctiveness of non-manual occupations within a system of social stratification and ideological formation. Such occupations, it is argued, are clearly elevated above manual employment in terms of social status: and this differentiation is reflected in self-conceptions and social attitudes favouring individualism, status-consciousness and a functionalist model of society. Hence it is argued that white-collar unionism confronts a resistance among potential recruits far more serious than that experienced by manual workers' organisations; to achieve significant membership, white-collar unions are often induced to repudiate many of the methods and traditions of the labour movement (Blackburn 1967). From a fairly simplistic Marxist perspective, such resistance would be taken as a form of false consciousness, often encouraged by the employer, inappropriate to the actual class position of the seller of non-manual labour power.

The tendency in recent research has been to emphasise *material* differences in the situation of white-collar and manual employees as the key explanation of contrasts in trade union consciousness. Lockwood (1958) points out that not only has the social status of white-collar workers been higher, but their qualifications in terms of literacy have entailed a superior market position, and their work situation has generally been more favourable than for manual workers. In a number of respects, he adds, these material advantages have diminished in recent years. Income differentials have shown signs of narrowing, as universal education reduces the market value of literacy (though it must be added that egalitarian tendencies in income have in most countries been less significant than often assumed). The growing size of the white-collar sector has led to a bureaucratisation of control, the routinisation of many tasks, and in some cases the application of 'scientific' techniques of task specification traditionally associated only with manual workers (though again, any notion of a general 'proletarianisation' of white-collar work is an exaggeration).<sup>10</sup> The more rigid differentiation between routine and superior white-collar positions, and the restrictive specification of criteria for entry to the latter, limit the promotion prospects of a growing proportion of non-manual workers. All these trends reduce many (though, Lockwood insists, not all) of the material advantages of white-collar over manual employment, and provide a stimulus to unionisation. To these factors, Bain (1970) has added the employer attitude as a major influence on the level of collective organisation. Private employers have often fiercely resisted staff unionisation, even where unions exist among the manual labour force. Staff are then inhibited from taking up union membership: either through ideological identification with the employer's viewpoint; or for fear of dismissal, damage to personal prospects of promotion, or other forms of victimisation; or simply because a weak and unrecognised union can win no improvements in

conditions from the employer and therefore has no concrete inducements to offer the potential member. Thus there can exist a vicious circle which is very difficult for a white-collar union to escape. By contrast, a union which enjoys employer recognition can far more easily recruit and maintain membership. This helps explain the marked contrast in Britain between the public sector, with some 80 per cent unionisation of white-collar workers, and the private sector, where for much of the post-war period the proportion was only 12 per cent.

The elucidation of the material basis of white-collar attitudes to trade unionism is closely linked to the problem of the class position of non-manual workers. Mallet (1963:13) commenced his study with a reference to the increasing difficulty of providing a definition of the working class. Class is to be defined, not as a concrete entity but in terms of a set of *relationships*: specifically, for Marxists, in terms of social relations of production. But in modern industry, the complexity of these relations is considerable. White-collar employees, like manual workers, sell their labour power as a commodity: but so, it could be added, do the most senior levels of management, whom few would regard as 'working class'. Do white-collar workers produce value, or are they parasitic on the surplus value which others create? Answering this question in general terms (and leaving aside the contentious issue whether value is created at all in certain sectors of the economy), it is possible to start with the argument of Marx in the third volume of *Capital*: 'The commercial labourer does not produce any surplus value directly. . . . He adds to the income of the capitalist, not by creating any direct surplus value, but by helping to reduce the costs of the realization of surplus value.' In this respect, the position of the white-collar worker is not radically distinct from that of many manual workers, who also contribute only indirectly to the production value. Indeed, a key characteristic of development beyond the most basic forms of industrial technology is that the proportion of indirect producers increases, the notion of individual productivity becomes problematic, and the *collective* character of production must be represented in the categories of analysis: 'As the co-operative character of the labour-process becomes more and more marked, so, as a necessary consequence, does our notion of productive labour, and of its agent, the productive labourer, become extended' (*Capital*, vol. 2). Theorists of the 'new working class' (e. g. Touraine 1971) go further, insisting that knowledge has itself become the main productive force in advanced industry; hence technically qualified labour (both manual and white-collar) has the strongest claim to be regarded as directly productive. The main objection to such arguments is their presentation as representing a radically new form of society. The *mix* of cerebral and operational functions may have altered, and with it the line of division between mental and manual labour; but it is misleading to present this as a new mode of production. As Giddens (1973: 262) insists, 'modern technology is not "post-industrial" at all, but is the fruition of the principle of accelerating technical growth built into industrialism as such.'<sup>11</sup>

Also relevant to the social location of white-collar employees is their role in the structure of domination and subordination. Dahrendorf employs the Weberian categories of authority and 'imperatively co-ordinated association' (*Herrschaftsverband*) as the key elements in a theory of class division: with a remarkable degree of abstract formalism he asserts that 'the authority structure of industrial organizations *ipso facto* defines the borderline that divides the two aggregates of those on positions of dominance and those in positions of subjection. . . . Industrial organizations are in this sense dichotomous' (1959:296). A somewhat arbitrary division is applied between 'bureaucrats' and 'white-collar employees' to whom are attributed opposing positions in the class divide. This mechanical treatment fails to take any account of the varying types and levels of authority and control which constitute the social relations of production. As any elementary account of managerial sociology indicates, authority is not in practice the exclusive prerogative of those formally designated as occupying positions of line management; while conversely, there are many in managerial positions who lack effective influence over, interest in or commitment to the main policy priorities of the employing organisation. As Willener and his associates (1969) demonstrate, the relationships between and within senior plant management, technical management and line management are complex and fluid; many are separated both physically and hierarchically from the effective exercise of power. Those who exercise the 'labour of superintendence' in subordinate positions – as well as most non-managerial white-collar employees – possess interests which are in part convergent with those of manual workers and opposed to those of senior directive management.

All this is to emphasise the analytical significance of a variety of points of differentiation *within* the general category of white-collar employment. The analysis of a number of sociologists has been vitiated by the treatment of this category as a coherent entity. Parkin (1971) insists on the existence of a simple 'class boundary' segregating manual from non-manual employees. Giddens (1973:177) assumes the propriety of 'using the term "middle class" without qualification to refer to propertyless non-manual, or "white-collar" workers'. And Dahrendorf, as has been seen, is equally sweeping in his notion of a dichotomy of domination: 'the ruling-class theory applies without exception to the social position of bureaucrats, and the working-class theory equally generally to the social position of white-collar workers' (1959:55). It must be insisted on the contrary that the inequalities within the category of 'white-collar employees' in terms of power, status, career prospects, conditions of work and income (the distribution of white-collar incomes shows a far higher dispersion and is far more skewed than is the case among manual workers) make it illegitimate to treat their class situation as uniform.

The variations in the material situation of different white-collar groups may be expected to be reflected in their attitudes to collective organisation and action: their readiness to organise at all, their preference for a separate white-collar union or one catering for all categories of workers, their disposition to specific types of demands and forms of action. As Bain *et al.*

(1973) demonstrate, the trade union experience of non-manual workers is extremely heterogeneous – as is also true, indeed, of manual workers. Certainly no clear dichotomy can be drawn. Nevertheless, certain tentative generalisations are made possible by the effects of the sharp *historical* differentiation between the two types of labour. The early categories of non-manual employees, as a small and privileged social grouping, were closely implicated with the employer and integrated into civil society: they experienced both a practical and ideological resistance to collective action in respect of their employment interests. Manual workers possessed far more urgent practical interests in trade unionism; and being ideologically detached from civil society, experienced fewer normative inhibitions. The situation today is one in which trade unionism itself has become largely integrated into civil society, while the objective conditions of many sections of white-collar employees have altered. According to Mills (1951) the continuing low level of white-collar unionism is to be explained (when not directly attributable to employer resistance) as the outcome of cultural and organisational lag, which over time will diminish in effect. Mills also suggests that newly established white-collar unions may be *either* less militant than manual (because of the continued inhibiting effect of pre-collectivist values and assumptions); *or* more militant (because their relations with employers have not yet become institutionalised). In either case, he argues, the effect is likely to be short-lived.

Mills' two suggested variants of white-collar union development have obvious affinities with the conflicting interpretations of non-manual unionism popular in Britain and France respectively. The former is exemplified by the thesis of 'instrumental collectivism' expounded by Goldthorpe and Lockwood (1963). Unionisation, they suggest, typically involves no radical break with previous white-collar ideology: it represents the adoption of collective *means* which are seen as essential for the attainment of *ends* which are defined individualistically. Such unionism is characteristically sectional in inspiration, often oriented to the defence of a privileged position which manual unions are perceived as challenging, and hence carries no necessary implications of class solidarity or labour-movement ideology. (Their analysis assumes that such class orientations *were* fundamental to the 'solidaristic collectivism' traditional in manual trade unionism: an assumption which, as critics have argued, has little basis in historical fact.)

An altogether contrary perspective is developed by French theorists of the 'new working class'. Their focus is not on white-collar employees in general but on the technologically advanced industries, and the radical potential of unionism based on operative management, engineers and technicians, together with the technically trained manual workers. The argument common to Mallet and Touraine (who in other respects diverge) focuses on two features of the situation of such workers. They possess a high level of education and training; and they are firmly integrated into the social structure of the enterprise<sup>12</sup>. Such employees are therefore particularly conscious of their alienation, of the contradiction between their role in an *internally* rationalised production process and the subordination of this process

as a whole to external priorities of capitalist dynamics and class power. In earlier forms of manufacturing industry, trade union consciousness could not develop beyond the limits of 'conflictual participation': effectively contained within the logic and priorities of capitalism, yet unable and unwilling to develop strategies for the positive direction of industry. But unionism within technologically advanced industry, being firmly integrated within the enterprise, is explicitly concerned with positive questions of management and recognises that these cannot be divorced from the direction of the global economy. *Syndicalisme gestionnaire* thus unites all three elements of Touraine's famous schema of class consciousness: awareness of class identity, of opposition to capitalist class interests (though the focus of opposition is often identified as technocratic control rather than capitalism), and of the location of immediate conflicts in a totality of social relations which require wholesale transformation.

The experience of May 1968 is commonly cited as a validation of the thesis of the 'new working class' (Touraine 1968; Dubois *et al.* 1971; Durand 1971). *Cadres*, technicians, and workers in advanced industries figured particularly in the pursuit of new demands involving issues of control and company objectives; traditional sectors of organised workers by contrast expressed only economic demands (which facilitated the eventual agreement defusing the unrest). Some caution is however necessary. The evidence indicates that the role of explicitly managerial employees in the strike movement was limited and ambivalent (Dulong, in Dubois *et al.* 1971; Willener *et al.* 1969). Politically, the survey by Adam *et al.* (1970) shows that right-wing support among technicians and supervisors was considerably higher than among manual workers. This could be related to the political ambivalence of the demand for *gestion*: the explicitly class and oppositional content of the slogan *pouvoir ouvrier* is absent, and the possibility is not excluded of an essentially collaborative and sectionally technocratic strategy. 'Enterprise unionism' may thus be double-edged in its implications: as Goldthorpe *et al.* argue (1969: 186), the exponents of the theory do not convincingly demonstrate why the 'new working class' should not 'adopt an increasingly particularistic approach to industrial relations, thus giving rise to a new "corporatism" and the consolidation of a new labour aristocracy'. The advanced sectors of industry, because of their high productivity, can afford wages and conditions which yield their employees a position of relative privilege; and experience in a number of countries suggests that this can encourage pacific industrial relations. As Mann (1973) points out, the thesis of a coherent and radically inclined 'new working class' of technically qualified manual and non-manual employees appears seriously applicable only to French trade unionism. Three factors seem particularly relevant. First, the rigid hierarchy of industrial authority in France limits the promotion prospects of engineers and *cadres moyens*. Second, the reluctance of most employers to negotiate seriously at establishment level obstructs the development of collaborative industrial relations in the advanced sectors of industry.<sup>13</sup> Third – and perhaps partly as a consequence of both these factors – there appears to exist in France less

institutional separation between manual and white-collar unionism than in many other countries.

If the notion of the 'new working class' as a *generally* applicable characterisation of technicians and junior management must be treated sceptically, so must the analysis in terms of 'instrumental collectivism'. British experience is perhaps particularly relevant here. White-collar union membership, which for many years had merely kept pace with the growth in white-collar employment, has increased significantly in both absolute and relative terms in the past decade (Bain and Price 1972). The most rapidly expanding white-collar union, ASTMS, has used an image of militancy as a basis of recruitment appeal. DATA, the draughtsmen's union, adopted many of the traditions of manual union militancy, and its identification with the manual labour force was demonstrated by its decision to amalgamate into the AUEW (following which it was renamed TASS).<sup>14</sup> A number of public-sector white-collar unions have been involved in national stoppages in recent years, commonly as the result of pressure by influential rank-and-file movements. It has been argued that white-collar militancy is explicable in terms of the 'instrumental' concerns of non-manual employees in a period when they believe their economic advantages to be disappearing, and of the political attitudes of the union *leaderships* which are unrepresentative of most members. Thus Roberts *et al.* argue (1972:117-18) that:

the history of technicians' unions suggests that this category of workers is strongly status-conscious; but this status is seen primarily in labour-market terms. . . . Appeals to class concepts of trade unionism make little impact. Although the leadership of these unions has tended to be committed ideologically to left-wing Socialism, or even Communism, the collective bargaining policy actually adopted has reflected the practical requirements of the membership. The ideological wish of the leadership to attack the capitalist system, and the interest of members in securing immediate tangible monetary gains, have come together in a mutually satisfying aggressive policy to secure higher pay and improved conditions of employment.

The problem with such analyses is that notions of sectionalism and instrumentalism are often somewhat mechanically employed. In certain objective contexts there may exist a dialectical link between material demands and attacks on the capitalist system, or between sectional and class interests. Recent British experience indicates that narrowly sectional and economic objectives may engender broader and explicitly political struggles: for example, in resisting incomes policy or confronting the state as an employer. It is noteworthy that almost all the white-collar unions affiliated to the TUC observed the common policy of boycotting the institutions of the Industrial Relations Act. Political orientations and alliances in common struggle, which may initially reflect purely 'instrumental' considerations, can acquire the status of union objectives in their own right. As an example,

NALGO (the largest British white-collar union, which joined the TUC only a decade ago) has recently supported the building workers' campaign against 'labour-only' subcontracting by blacking work associated with such labour in local authorities. Involvement in common struggles also appears to encourage the formulation of economic demands in non-sectional form: there is some evidence in Britain of agreement by representatives of higher-paid non-manual employees to flat-rate wage increases, and in Germany since 1969 this has been a significant tendency.

Three general conclusions may be drawn from the debate on the significance of the growing white-collar labour force. The first is the difficulty of establishing *any* general conclusions: the internal differentiations among white-collar workers make simple generalisations about non-manual consciousness, unionism or militancy as unsafe as any analogous generalisations concerning manual workers. The second is that the relatively rapid development of the white-collar sector makes many elements in current non-manual status, conditions, attitude and organisation essentially *transitional*. This in itself, as Mills suggests, may be a source of contradictory possibilities in white-collar unionism: contradictions which, it might be proposed, could well be manifested by one and the same group at a single point of time. If this is so, the goals and strategies of non-manual labour might be expected to prove somewhat volatile: more so than in the case of relatively stable sections of manual labour. This also makes it very difficult to assess how far recent white-collar militancy derives from fundamental structural contradictions in contemporary capitalism, and how far it is merely a reflection of more superficial problems of a period of transformation. The third conclusion is that these contradictory possibilities may make white-collar workers particularly susceptible in their industrial activities to influences from *outside* the work situation. This is part of the objection raised by Goldthorpe and Lockwood (1969) to Mallet's analysis: it treats the role of labour *within* the technologically advanced enterprise as the directly decisive influence on consciousness and action, without taking account of the impact of externally generated variations in social ideology and imagery (Popitz *et al.* 1957). (Andrieux and Lignon (1973) stress that white-collar *activists* are typically motivated by factors external to their work situation – a characteristic distinguishing them from manual activists.) Such ideology and imagery may be strongly influenced by national cultural variations, and may shift significantly in response to conjunctural rather than structural developments. This *could* permit non-manual workers (and other new strata of the working class) in certain contexts to play an innovatory role within the broader labour movement.

### SOME GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF OCCUPATIONAL CHANGE

Some general points may be made in summarising the evidence of industrial and occupational trends. In a number of instances the data indicate that

alleged transformations in the industrial and occupational structure have been prematurely asserted: while such transformations may be plausibly predicted on the basis of extrapolations from current trends, the new strata of employment have not yet assumed a predominant role in the labour force. To this extent, any attempt to make such changes a key explanatory factor for *past* developments in working-class organisation and action must be regarded with scepticism.

An obvious feature of the occupational and industrial structure of the various countries is the *unevenness* of working-class experience. The processes of industrialisation and urbanisation continue at the same time as traditional industries suffer declining fortunes. Unevenness may be represented by the backwardness of a whole economy, the decay of particular regions within a country which possesses other areas of expansion and prosperity, the contrasting problems and fortunes of different sections of a national working class. This has obvious implications for the possibility of homogeneous and united working-class action.

Finally, the structure of employment is marked by fluidity. The *inevitability* of occupational and industrial change, and thus of the redundancy of established skills and established employment, has become a constantly asserted principle. Such redundancy has of course been a historically persistent characteristic of the dynamism of capitalist production; but it may today be found particularly objectionable on two grounds. First, it contradicts the widely propagated post-war ideology of 'full employment'. A frequent capitalist response is to conceal the import of redundancy through redefinition (in Britain, the euphemism of 'redeployment'), and to assert the necessity of job change as the price of industrial progress (an argument which trade unionists often feel ideologically incapacitated to resist). Second, the *practical* experience of recent years has involved the persistent erosion of the relative comfort of the post-war labour market; the 'damped' trade cycle of the post-war era nevertheless appears to imply increasing levels of unemployment, the expanding sectors failing to absorb all those workers displaced by technical innovation or industrial decline. The reality of unemployment thus confronts the rhetoric of redeployment.

The burden of the discussion in the previous sections has been that particular aspects of occupational change which have received sociological attention have not, in general, possessed unambiguous implications for the character of working-class consciousness, organisation and action. It might seem that *a fortiori*, and given the lack of clear-cut general trends in occupational composition as such, little serious generalisation can be offered concerning the significance of changes in the occupational structure *as a whole*. Yet the increasing differentiation of occupational experience is itself attributed general significance. According to Kern and Schumann (1970: 274), the growing fragmentation of the objective contexts and contents of occupations obstructs recourse to notions of class identity based on shared work experience: indeed today not even the vocabulary exists to make the experience of one occupational group comprehensible to others. This

argument may be related to that of Lockwood (1966): that images of the society as a whole reflect workers' experiences in small-scale milieux and primary relationships; and hence that variations in localised settings are reflected in perceptions of the total pattern. Heterogeneity, it is implied, is almost necessarily divisive.

Such a thesis cannot be accepted without qualification. Technical change may have created exotic new occupational categories and unfamiliar work situations and techniques; but heterogeneity and uneven development have *always* been characteristic of capitalist economic relations. A tape-sizer in cotton-weaving, a puddler in steel-smelting, a clicker in a shoe factory, a slotting-machine operator in an engineering workshop, a deal porter on the docks, a still-man in a chemical plant – to name some of the less esoteric nineteenth-century occupations – could have known little of each other's work, could have possessed few means of conveying the nature of their own to others. Moreover, as Lane (1974) has argued, workers' perceptions and union organisation shared (in Britain at least) a mutually reinforcing sectionalism. If ideas of class identity nevertheless developed this was against the odds.

One reason why class consciousness could historically – and still can – at least partially develop is that work *tasks* as such are not the sole constitutive element in awareness of alienation and exploitation. Labour power remains a commodity despite the manifold variations in the labour process, and from this fact the *relationship* of wage-labour derives an ineluctable structural similarity. Moreover, it remains true that 'no sooner is the exploitation of the labourer by the manufacturer so far at an end, that he receives his wages in cash, than he is set upon by the other portions of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker, etc.'. Such relationships are all potential sources of awareness of class identity and class opposition. A more general argument here requires emphasis, that sectional and class consciousness are not mutually exclusive alternatives. Awareness of common class identity is constituted out of consciousness of sectional interests; it does not presuppose the elimination of sectional loyalties and identifications. What is at issue is *how* sectional interests are perceived: sectionalism is divisive when one group defines and pursues its interests in opposition to those of others, but may be unifying if the diversity of immediate work contexts is seen to contain elements of convergence which can best be pursued through common struggle (Hyman 1975).

Capitalist relations of production necessarily create moments of such convergence. Two in particular have been of significance in a number of countries in recent years. The first is the growing role of the state in economic affairs, an intervention necessitated by the inability of private capital to resolve the contradictions which confront it. Government intervention necessarily extends to labour relations: attempts to control wage increases, to stimulate more intensive exploitation of labour, to impose legislative restrictions on strike activity. All such interventions help to *generalise* the discrete struggles of separate industrial and occupational groups, and to transcend discontinuities in industrial and political consciousness. It is

significant that state power has been prominently implicated in many of the recent struggles in which the labour movement has most nearly acted as a coherent totality.

The second factor of great significance in recent years is the growing consciousness of insecurity of employment. Recession, even if moderate by pre-war standards, has become an inescapable fact of economic life – made all the more distasteful through habituation to over two decades of the notion of full employment. The job consciousness of workers – even those whose orientations approximate most closely to the ‘instrumental’ ideal type – cannot exclude the possibility of conflict over the protection of the job itself. A novel sense of insecurity has been an important element in the pressures driving high-status white-collar employees to unionise. Among workers generally, occasional dramatic instances of work-ins and occupations underline the fact that the struggle for the right to work necessarily involves the question of the *control* of production and of economic relations in general. The right to work, as Marx insisted, ‘is, in the bourgeois sense, an absurdity, a miserable, pious wish. But behind the right to work stands the power over capital; behind the power over capital, the appropriation of the means of production, their subjection to the associated working class and, therefore, the abolition of wage labour of capital and of their mutual relations’ (*The Class Struggles in France*).

The point of these examples is not to suggest the necessity or inevitability of increasing class-consciousness, of a developing awareness of common identity and a common struggle. It is however to argue that there exist within contemporary capitalism tendencies which run counter to those of fragmentation and division. These contradictory tendencies offer a genuine openness for future development.

While one factor inhibiting accurate prediction is the area of choice available for working-class practice in a context of contradictory social forces, another is the still primitive character of sociological knowledge in the area discussed in this paper. The central weakness of much of the literature surveyed is its combination of a high level of generality with a lack of systematic and comparative empirical underpinning. Plausible but mutually inconsistent theories have all been offered some measure of empirical support; but the evidence is often selective (based on arguably untypical case studies) or impressionistic. Far more research is required in order to illuminate the interrelationship of occupation, organisation and militancy.

Further advance requires an integrated development of classification, empirical investigation and theoretical interpretation. Conventional occupational categorisation is often crude, tends to reflect outdated official or managerial preoccupations, and is ill-suited to cross-national comparison. Kern and Schumann demonstrate one sociologically relevant approach to occupational classification (though confined to direct production operatives) which, while open to criticism, does indicate possible lines along which a more comprehensive classificatory framework for occupations could be related to the interpretative concerns of this paper.

Within such a framework, a priority should be the compilation of adequate statistics of labour force composition, union membership, strike participation etc. (reliable statistical data being a serious lack in the case of a number of countries). In some cases it may prove possible to re-work existing data within new categories; in others, a more extensive task of statistical research may prove necessary. The compilation of such data is however an essential prerequisite for systematic discussion of trends in collective organisation and action among specific occupational groups. Firm evidence of such trends can indicate in turn those occupational groups whose attitudes and actions merit detailed sociological investigation, permitting greater refinement of research and more ready comparability with the findings of other studies.

The ultimate aim of greater specificity in research must be to facilitate more reliable generalisation. The dependent variables involved in any study of occupational consciousness and action are numerous: the level and stability of unionisation; the objectives pursued (economistic demands, control over the production process, broader social and political goals); tactical and strategic militancy; the character of internal trade union democracy; orientations towards sectionalism or class unity. The occupational features identified in the literature as possible determinants are even more numerous. They include such broad contextual factors as the growth or the contraction of the occupation, its location in profitable and expanding or depressed and declining industries, geographical location and social status; labour market characteristics such as education and qualifications, employment security and income levels; demographic features of occupational composition such as sex, race and social and geographical origins; characteristics of the work situation including the physical environment, the nature and complexity of tasks, work pressure and workload, and social relations within the production process (interaction with fellow workers, degree of autonomy in task performance, relations with superiors and/or subordinates – which in turn reflect managerial policies and control structures). Both the actual character, and the nature of any changes, in these variables may be plausibly identified as influences on trade union action – doubtless mediated and qualified by such factors as national cultural and political characteristics and organisational structures and ideologies.

Existing theories and hypotheses involve, in the main, the assertion of relatively simple links between a limited number of dependent and independent variables; whereas it should be clear that the dialectic between occupational character and collective consciousness and action is highly complex, and that a sophisticated multi-causal analysis is necessary. To take one example: it was suggested in a previous section that skilled workers who enjoy secure employment prospects and job autonomy tend towards sectionalism and conservatism, whereas in a context of insecurity and erosion of craft control they may be associated with radical demands and militant action. What qualifications to this generalisation are necessary to take account, say, of national variations in trade union traditions or the social status of skilled manual work? In analysing such complex interrelationships,

do the very concepts of conservatism, radicalism, militancy require refinement? Until more of the groundwork suggested in the previous paragraphs has been accomplished, answers to such questions can only be of the most tentative order.

## NOTES

1. O'Connor's general analysis involves a distinction between the monopoly, competitive and state sectors which is somewhat mechanical. His thesis that collaboration between 'big capital' and 'big labour' in the monopolistic sector sets the main framework for the current economic functions of the state is clearly structured by the character of trade unionism and industrial relations practices in the United States, and by the size and character of the reserve army of unemployed; it cannot be applied without qualification to the European situation. For an analysis with some affinities to that of O'Connor see Offe 1972.
2. France also represents an exception to the general tendency of security of employment in the state sector, because of the large proportion of *auxiliaires* and *interimaires* employed.
3. This may however have acquired renewed importance during the recession of the early 1970s: strongly organised groups in the private sector have tended to display restraint through fear of precipitating closures and redundancies, but the absence of comparable economic constraints in the public sector may have helped sustain the new militancy of public employees.
4. More sophisticated classifications are of course provided in most job evaluation schemes within individual firms or industries; or even across a national labour market, as with the Parodi scheme in France or the Dutch job classification system.
5. In certain respects, their analysis provides a more sophisticated version of the 'inverted-U' hypothesis popularised by Blauner (1964). It should be noted that their classification applies only to workers directly involved with the production process – whereas technological development, as has often been noted, involves an increasing proportion of 'indirects'.
6. Paci argues (1973:151–2) that the change from craft to company-specific skills shifts the balance of power in the labour market from worker to employer. But in fact, the change creates a *two-way* relationship of increased dependence: the limited transferability of skills makes it harder for the worker to move elsewhere, but also for the employer to recruit new labour from the external labour market.
7. The lack of experience of an era of sustained mass unemployment may be one reason for such higher expectations; the mere possession of a job is less likely to be viewed as grounds for satisfaction. The ubiquitous influence of advertising, the mass media, etc., may also generate heightened 'relative deprivation'.
8. This hypothesis is certainly taken seriously by many of those in charge of capitalist economies and enterprises – indicated, for example, by the Special Task Force report *Work in America*, or by recent managerial enthusiasm for dubious notions of 'job enrichment'.
9. Discussion is hampered by the lack of a detailed occupational breakdown within the labour-force statistics of most countries in the first post-war decade.
10. The process of 'office automation' was identified, some two decades ago, as a significant emergent trend. The transformation of *some* white-collar (in particular, clerical) work to 'rationalised' processes analogous to mass-production factory techniques has certainly occurred in some areas of commercial employment (see for example Crozier 1965; Braverman 1975). One may also cite the mechanisation and specialisation of tasks in many retail department stores and supermarkets. But such a development is far from universal, and appears to depend both on the degree of routine inherent in the functions performed and also on the power resources at the disposal of the occupational groups concerned. Carchedi's analysis (1975) is relevant here: certain categories of white-collar workers occupy a dual position, contributing to collective productivity within the technical division of labour, while at the same time serving the 'global functions of capital' through the exercise of surveillance and control over the subordinate labour force. Those groups for whom the latter function is

predominant are most likely to withstand any purely technical tendencies towards 'proletarianisation'.

11. Giddens adds that 'Marx was probably mistaken to regard tool-using and production as the basic quality of human as opposed to animal life'. It is questionable whether this was in fact Marx's view. He wrote, of course, that 'the use and fabrication of instruments of labour, although existing in the germ among certain species of animals, is specifically characteristic of the human labour-process'. But this is immediately preceded by the famous passage in which Marx comments: 'We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of the form in the material on which he works, but he also realises a purpose of his own that gives the law to his *modus operandi*' (*Capital*, vol. 1). Hence human labour was conceived by Marx essentially as the *combination* of knowledge with productive activity; machines, as he wrote in the *Grundrisse*, 'are organs of the human brain, created by the human hand; the power of knowledge, objectified'.
12. Mallet (1963:55-7) discusses three modes of integration which he considers to be necessitated by the economic, technical and organisational characteristics of advanced industry.
13. In the categories employed by Durand (1971), an accommodative attitude on the part of employers might encourage a trade union orientation in terms of *syndicalisme de bargaining* (C2) rather than *syndicalisme gestionnaire* (C3).
14. This identification owes much to the common occupational background of craft apprenticeship which many draughtsmen share with skilled manual workers.

### 3 *Women and Immigrants: Marginal Workers?*

THIERRY BAUDOUIN, MICHELE  
COLLIN AND DANIELE GUILLERM

Women and immigrants are largely unqualified, i.e. unskilled, workers, and a clearer picture of the characteristics of their involvement in industrial conflict will therefore be obtained by an analysis of the situation of women and immigrant workers within the fragmented and repetitive production process and also of their particular struggle. Calling into question as they do a system of negotiation between capital and labour that is based on the buying and selling of skill-level and in which they can have no part, unqualified workers reveal by their actions the basis of the prevailing system of production on *lack* of skill. The worker is plainly reduced to a role as a mere force of labour over and above any ideological considerations the aim of which is to value work as a means of allowing the worker to have some control over his own exploitation.

However, on another level these conflicts also reveal a refusal to accept a role as simply a unit force of labour. Reduced as he is to the status of a machine, it is not possible for the unskilled worker to define his situation solely in terms of production criteria. He will advance other motives, other demands and other modes of action which go way beyond the bounds of a single-plant situation. This is why for some years now it has not been possible to speak simply of 'unskilled labour conflict'; we must talk in terms of unskilled women workers or immigrant workers. It is no longer simply a case of treating workers as workers: questions of sex, race or region arise, and it is their particular feature above and beyond their status as unskilled workers that forms the basis of this analysis of women and immigrants and also provides a means of understanding the marginal characteristic attributed to them by the dominant ideology.

The following is not therefore meant to be an exhaustive analysis, since the theme that it deals with, by bringing together two particular categories of workers, is of itself hypothetical. The work is supported for the major part by research carried out at the present time both in France and in other countries and its aim is to provide a contribution to the analysis of these social movements.

## THE SITUATION OF WOMEN AND IMMIGRANTS IN THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

There is nothing new in women working in a wage-earning capacity nor in the migration of workers between different countries. We only have to look at the development of the textile industry during the nineteenth century, due largely to the use of female labour and also worker migration within Europe such as that of the Irish to England, or migration on an inter-continental scale such as that which contributed to populating and industrialising North America. Why is it then that these phenomena appear once again in the foreground of social affairs?

It is necessary to analyse the role played by these groups at the present time in the development of production forces in Europe and, from this, to attempt to appreciate the significance of their appearance as specific movements in the social conflicts of recent years. This will lead us on to discuss the concept of marginality and to see how relevant this concept is in the light of the facts set out beforehand.

We shall first look at the figures giving the proportions of women and immigrants working in Europe together with their socio-economical status. It must be said straight away that, according to their various sources (either national or, for example, from the International Labour Office), the statistics for both women and immigrant workers fluctuate considerably, when they are not frankly contradictory. It is always difficult to make international statistical comparisons and, particularly in this case, they must be regarded critically. The figures concern solely the situation of women and immigrants as members of the labour force.

### WOMEN

It is customary to acknowledge that the proportion of women in the active labour force has not increased (when it has not in fact decreased) since the beginning of this century. It must however be remembered that the drain away from rural areas to the towns has been more marked in the case of women than men. If we take only those figures referring to recent years, Belgium has lost 200,000 women of working age from the agricultural sector; Italy lost 730,000 between 1961 and 1967 (i.e. — 34.6 per cent, the corresponding proportion for men being only — 22.5 per cent); while France lost 800,000 between 1954 and 1969 (— 29.3 per cent, men — 20 per cent). It can therefore be affirmed that there has been an increase in the overall number of paid jobs in the industrial and service sectors, except in certain particular cases.

Table 3.1 gives the percentage of women in the total active labour force.

These figures must be seen in the light of the very different agricultural situations in each particular country and must be interpreted accordingly.

The drop in the female activity rate in Western Germany is to be seen in relation to the extent of participation of women in the primary sector (in 1966, still 54 per cent women in agriculture out of all sectors).

TABLE 3.1 *Percentage of women in total active labour force*

Belgium	Year	1961	1966	1970	1972
	%	27.56	30.81	29.64	33.23
France	Year	1962	1968	1971	1975
	%	33.41	34.52	35.85	36.58
Italy	Year	1961	1966	1971	1975
	%	24.92	26.91	27.42	28.05
Netherlands	Year	1960	—	1971	—
	%	22.26		26.00	
UK	Year	1961	1966	1971	—
	%	32.37	33.57	36.50	
West Germany	Year	1961	1966	1970	1974
	%	36.73	36.07	35.83	36.92

Source: ILO *Yearbook of Statistics*.

In virtually every country women are almost always offered the prospect of jobs requiring lower skill-levels. The problem of equal pay for equal skill-levels for men and women certainly still exists almost everywhere, but it is less great than that of discrimination according to occupation, with jobs that are either wholly or almost exclusively reserved for female labour and which always turn out to demand no skill and no responsibility (Sullerot 1971: 100). The most striking phenomenon in recent years concerning the employment of women has been their arrival on a massive scale into the tertiary sector, so that they are now in a majority. But here once again management functions are reserved for men, and women fill the mass of office, commercial and service jobs at the bottom of the scale.

Office work and employment in service industries are all the more 'proletarianised' in the sense that the predominance of unskilled jobs makes it impossible for the great majority of workers in these sectors to fulfil a 'career pattern' in the way that was once possible. The only careers possible within a firm are linked to factors that have nothing to do with promotion through the hierarchy. In the main, they are related to length of service. Yet one of the main features of these layers of the working population is their high mobility, in and out of active employment, from one firm to another, or from one sector to another.

## IMMIGRANTS

The same features of unskilled jobs and 'reserved' employment sectors are found for immigrants:

TABLE 3.2 *Immigrants in the labour force (1967-8)*

	<i>Total immigrant workers</i>	<i>% of overall labour force</i>
France	1,254,460	6.3
West Germany	1,501,409	7
Great Britain	1,559,200	6.5

Source: Castles and Kossack 1973:61.

It must be noted that, besides the very low skill level, discrimination by sex once again comes into play and *immigrant female workers* have a still lower skill level than that of immigrant males. For France, the 1968 census provides us with the following figures for the proportion of foreigners in relation to the total population of the same socio-professional category (CEDETIM 1975:340): foremen, 4.03 per cent; skilled workers, 8.67 per cent; semi-skilled workers, 10.63 per cent; unskilled workers, 21.62 per cent.

Examination of the regional distribution of immigrants in Europe shows that they cover essentially those areas that are most highly industrialised, and which also have a long history of industrialisation behind them.

In West Germany, immigrants are found in the Ruhr, Hessen, Baden Württemberg, and in the industrial south of Bavaria, with few in the North and East of the country where there is less industrial growth. The principal cities inhabited by immigrants are Frankfurt, Munich and Stuttgart, where they make up 17 per cent of the population.

In Great Britain, the six largest conurbations, with 36 per cent of the overall population, contain 56 per cent of the immigrant population, more than one third living in the Greater London area. Commonwealth (coloured) immigrants are even more concentrated in number, with nearly two-thirds of them in the six conurbations.

The heaviest concentrations in France are in the Paris region, the North, Moselle, and the Rhone-Alps region, more particularly Lyons and the South. Two-thirds of the immigrants live in these areas, as against only 47 per cent of the overall population in France. In the Paris region alone there are 31.2 per cent of the immigrants compared with 19.2 per cent of the whole population.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FEMALE/IMMIGRANT LABOUR FORCE

There are two possible explanations of this employment pattern of women and immigrants:

(i) It may be considered to be a *distinctive feature* of these particular strata of wage-earners. They have the least well-paid and the most unpleasant jobs because they have arrived only recently on the labour market, and fill the gaps left by the conventional labour force:

Immigrant workers in France, Germany, Switzerland and Great Britain are as a general rule employed in jobs that are refused by the local labour force. In a situation of full employment, the nationals in the countries concerned have taken advantage of the opportunities of finding better paid and more pleasant jobs. . . . The immigrants have found only those jobs left over by the others (Castles and Kossack 1973:112).

Such a way of looking at things presents unskilled jobs as jobs that are *residual* in relation to the drive towards modernisation and automation that offers local workers skilled jobs in the secondary or tertiary sectors. The term marginal may therefore be applied to categories such as women and immigrants, employed in jobs that appear to go completely against the tide of the evolution of capitalism.

(ii) Alternatively it can be argued that the development of the employment of women and immigrants ties in with the present-day development of production forces, and hence the types of employment offered in this way are not marginal to the system but inherent features of it.

These two arguments rest in fact on two opposing analyses of the evolution of work organisation. We shall look at them briefly from the point of view of the skill level and mobility of this labour force.

### LABOUR-FORCE SKILL LEVEL

The quantitative and qualitative transformations within the various components of the wage-earning population are very important for an understanding of the types of conflict situation which appear (see Chapter 2). We would only emphasise here the point concerning the evolution of the unskilled labour force within present-day structures of production. This is central to our argument. We have shown the statistical predominance of unskilled work in employment undertaken by women and immigrants. A knowledge of the nature of these jobs, whether they are residual or in expanding areas of employment, will have a direct influence on the importance to be attached to those conflicts that are carried out by these categories. In the first case, these conflicts will be eliminated bit by bit and will affect neither the nature of the

established unions nor industrial relations. In the second case, however, they could be a foretaste of a new kind of industrial relations or, even more broadly, a new kind of society.

It is generally agreed that mechanisation, together with Taylorisation, has been a factor towards a massive drop in skill-level requirements. The most striking example is that of the British motor industry which has renewed its structures of production less than its European counterparts, and employs a much greater amount of skilled labour and, leading from this, comparatively fewer immigrant workers.

The argument therefore revolves around not mechanisation but automation. The problem is a dual one: on the one hand, what share does automation have in the present system, and what are its chances of developing?; and on the other hand, what type of employment does it induce, and does it lead to further new skills?

On the first point, it is once again almost universally recognised that the development of automation has not been as spectacular as was expected back in the 1950s. Only continuous-flow production industries (petroleum, steel, artificial fibres and plastics) are dependent upon virtually fully automated processes. Why then does automation not affect all other branches of industry? Some feel that it is precisely because of the existence of an immense pool of cheap labour (women and immigrants) that the process has been slowed down. This was the view taken by S. Mallet in the foreword to the reissue of his book on 'the new working class' (1969), when he referred to decentralised production plants employing a majority of unskilled workers. Bellon (1975:174) also regards unskilled workers as a 'reserve army' keeping the 'dominated' sectors of industry going, as opposed to the true 'regular army' made up of the skilled workers and qualified technicians of the 'dominant' sectors, i.e. those 'which have completed or are in the process of completing the transition from mechanisation to automation'.

These arguments do not place enough importance on the contradictions within the system, especially between the kind of production and the technology required. It may indeed be considered that the fact that there has not been a transition to generalised automation may be due to the development of branches specialised in the production of consumer goods, the market for which is sustained by deliberate product obsolescence (Laboratoire de Sociologie de la Connaissance 1973:82 ff). Under these circumstances, automation is impossible due to the combined effect of two things. First, the bulk of research programmes is directed towards more diversified and sophisticated products and, arising from this, it becomes more difficult to develop automation that can adapt itself continually to the dictates of fashion.

The question is not therefore one of saying that the transition to full automation is not possible but showing that this would be 'a capitalist utopia'. The dominant reality is not simply the one that prevails at the present time but that which is also logically implied given expansion based on the 'consumer society', and the brunt is borne by unskilled workers such as we

know them and such as they are developing, especially women and immigrant workers.

Moreover it remains to be seen whether automation as practised in contemporary systems is indeed the solution to the ills inherent in unskilled work. In fact, besides a small number of qualified technicians, it has maintained an increasingly great demand for workers requiring no skill (whether we call them machine-minders, push-button operatives or whatever) (ACADI 1972).

In a study of the tendency towards 'non-qualified/over-qualified' employment, Michel Freyssenet also gives a negative answer to the question 'Can generalised automatisisation do away with low-skilled work?' Two reasons are given:

(a) the job of 'supervisor' of an automated machine does not need any 'skill qualification' even though the serious consequences arising from not respecting the requirements of supervision mean that those who do these jobs have considerable responsibility, and (b) the 'over-skilled' jobs undergo in turn a process of reduction in skill level (Freyssenet 1974).

The general increase in the tertiary sector is also unable to provide any expectation of the disappearance of fragmentary forms of work. In all advanced service sectors (e.g. banking, insurance, department stores) there is a noticeable fragmentation of work tasks. This leads to an increase in the number of unskilled white-collar employees, and their problems have become apparent during several recent disputes. These jobs are almost invariably filled by women, while the men employed in these sectors virtually all hold positions further up the hierarchy. A female proletariat is thus created with no place in posts of 'responsibility', which remain 'a man's job' in popular imagery. It must be noted how, due to trends in work organisation, the jobs done by unskilled workers in the secondary and tertiary sectors nowadays become more and more similar. There are no great differences between a woman doing unskilled work in electronics and a punch-card operator in terms of work environment, actions to be accomplished, or relations with the hierarchy, and the disputes involving one or other of these groups draw them even closer together.

We should not be misled by official figures produced by the various countries concerned which show a slight decrease in unskilled jobs and a slight progression in the amount of skilled work. The official skill level should be taken as being the expression of the balance of power between capital and labour at a given moment. This is particularly clear in the case of Italy, where demands in recent years have been formulated around union policy on relative skill classifications (Paci 1973). In the study previously quoted, Freyssenet shows how payment by skill level is used as a 'responsibility bonus', output bonus, or anti-strike or 'social peace' bonus (1974:126-131).

In order to obtain the abundant supply of low-skilled manpower that it requires, capital must proceed either by reducing the skill level of the labour

force at hand, which carries the risk of bringing about serious social consequences (cf. the widespread conflicts in the Lorraine steel industry in 1967) or by using various means to get rid of its skilled labour (early retirement, change of job to a sector that is not yet modernised, promotion to 'overqualified' jobs), and recruit a *new labour force*, i.e. immigrants, women, rural labour, etc., to do work of lower skill level.

The strategy has been different according to the level of industrialisation of each country.

*Italy:* While this country has experienced little immigration as such, there has been the widespread internal migration that has permitted the development of the northern part of the peninsula. Italian capital has taken full advantage of the imbalance between those areas that are already industrialised (Piedmont and Lombardy) and the rest of the country, in particular the South, a region that is still fairly underdeveloped. It has done this just at the time when there was a requirement for a great deal of unskilled labour. The mechanism of internal migration has in fact been used, not to compensate for shortages in manpower, but as a *substitute* for the local skilled labour force in declining industries. This did not manifest itself by unemployment in the North, but by an increase in the inactive population (older persons still capable of working and women, especially in the declining textile industry, etc.) (Paci 1973:139).

*West Germany and Great Britain:* Of all the nations of Europe, Great Britain is the oldest in terms of industrialisation and it is certainly the one that has had the most difficulty in readapting its skilled labour force; so much so that this handicap has slowed down considerably the country's industrial development. Britain thus has a much less dynamic economy than other European countries. What is more, the situation of immigrants in Britain varies widely according to their origin, whether they come from Ireland, the countries of the 'Old Commonwealth', or newly-independent Commonwealth countries. There is not the same concentration of immigrant workers in particular industries (the motor industry, building) as is the case in other countries, and they are distributed throughout the industrial sectors in similar proportions to local workers.

As for West Germany, post-war reconstruction placed it in a better position to plan the arrival of new manpower. It is interesting to note that immediately after the War, there was considerable use of female labour. Until 1956 West Germany had the highest level of women in employment in Europe (36.6 per cent), and this rate remained steady for a time before declining. Apparently at this point immigrants, and especially women immigrants, took over (these latter are particularly numerous, with as many as 400,000 out of a total immigrant population of 1,400,000). Hence, in the electronics industry, which employs a great deal of unskilled female labour, 15 per cent of the labour force is made up of immigrant women. Similarly, the figure for textiles and clothing is 18 per cent.

*France and Belgium:* France is in a situation that is a mixture between those countries that call upon the resources of internal migration and those that utilise immigration. Until the beginning of the 1960s, industry as in other countries made extensive use of the displacement of manpower from within its own borders (Touraine 1962). Within Metropolitan France there was in fact a wide social and geographical difference between certain industrial centres (the North, Lorraine, the Paris Basin, and the area of Lyons) and entirely rural zones (West and South-West) containing isolated areas of development (Nantes, Bordeaux, etc.).

However it was only from 1961-2 that the development and modernisation of industry in France became firmly established. Two different strategies were applied at this period in order to find the new labour that was required: the development of an immigration policy and the decentralisation of industry. The aim of this latter was to implant new factories into rural areas so as to offer unskilled jobs to ex-farmers who were no longer working on the land, to unemployed young people and to women living in these regions. In this way, from 1963 to 1974, the electronics industry created 10,000 jobs for women workers in Brittany alone, and the motor industry sought unskilled (male) workers at Le Mans, Caen, Rennes and other towns in the West. Immigrants are, as we have seen, generally localised in industrial areas of long standing, and hence fill the new low-skilled jobs left vacant after internal migration. In France, the numbers built up from 1956 to 1958, fell back in 1959, then continually grew from 1962, easing off only since 1971.

During the last ten years, Belgium has also experienced an expansion of industry towards rural Flanders, especially as a result of the creation of new production plants by multinational firms (see the paper by Molitor in the companion volume, pp 21-51). However in addition to this it has called on a considerable immigrant labour force in the Walloon region, the older industrial area.

## THE ELASTICITY OF THE NEW LABOUR FORCE

Women and immigrants doing low-skilled jobs in high-growth sectors are the first to be affected in a recession. Sectors with the highest annual rates of expansion are hit while there is apparently no particular change in the situation of stagnating or declining sectors. This labour force therefore has the advantage for capital of being much more elastic than conventional manpower. Women become housewives once again, and a timely ideological campaign may help a move back to the home. As for immigrants, they either return to their own countries or display further mobility by moving from one region or from one European country to another.

Two striking examples of this phenomenon are (a) in the case of women, the Italian recession of 1963; and (b) in the case of immigrants, the German recession of 1967. (a) Between 1961 and 1967 the number of women at work in Italy dropped from 6 m. to 5 m. while the decline in male workers was considerably less. The decline also set in earlier (1962) for women than for

TABLE 3.3 *Variation in percentage of female workers employed in Italy*

Industries	1958-63	1963-7
Food	+32.53	-17.91
Natural fibres	-9.04	-28.23
Metals	+46.19	-1.09
Electro-mechanics	+44.38	-6.69
Engineering	+27.89	-26.20
Chemicals	+9.99	-4.18
Printing and allied trades	+6.43	-17.13

Source: Paci 1973:115

men (1964). Part of the decline in the female rate was due to the number leaving agriculture or to the decline in traditional activities, but Table 3.3 confirms our thesis that, when the recession occurred, the drop was felt largely in high-growth sectors which had recruited a great deal of labour earlier. (b) Immigrants in West Germany experienced the same fate in the 1966-7 recession. In this case, it was the country of origin (and family structure as in the case of women) which served to cushion the recession. The number of foreign workers went down from 1,244,000 in 1966 to 1,014,000 in 1967, rising to 1,019,000 in 1968, 1,366,000 in 1969 and 1,807,000 in 1970.

In spite of these figures, it cannot be said that the effect of the recession was purely and simply to expel immigrant workers. Indeed, few immigrants took advantage of unemployment benefit (the increase in the rate of unemployment among immigrants is less than in the population as a whole).

TABLE 3.4 *Unemployment rates in W. Germany (%)*

	Overall	Immigrants
December 1965	0.8	0.2
December 1966	1.8	1.2
March 1967	3.1	2.8
December 1967	1.8	1.1

Source: OECD 1972

What happened was that immigrant workers went 'into reserve', returning to their countries of origin on 'extended leave', the larger firms having taken precautions to recuperate them after the crisis (Reiffers 1970). This had the further advantage for employers of enabling them to take back only those immigrant workers judged to be the most suitable and to reorganise jobs thus providing an appreciable rise in productivity (11.1 per cent between the end of 1966 and the end of 1967) (*ibid.*).

Finally there was a noticeable drift of immigrants between regions or from one European country to another, either to search for new centres of employment or to settle with other members of the family or with friends who were assured of an income. In 1968 in France, for example, small colonies of Portuguese settled in rural areas where they had not been found previously (in the Massif Central, the West and the Vosges region); in this way they awaited a recovery in the activity of industrial areas (Poinard 1971).

Though this elasticity in the face of crises is of particular interest at the present time, it is not the whole story. It is outside the crisis periods that elasticity shows most clearly, characterising the use of female and immigrant labour and that of all those doing unqualified work, including production line operatives and school-leavers.

In a highly competitive production situation, orientated towards consumer goods or material that is rapidly obsolescent, industry is forced to increase the mobility of the capital at its disposal so as to take full advantage of varying profit rates (according to the branch of industry and according to region). It is also obliged to increase productivity by continually modifying the structure of production. The mobility of capital, both in space and in kind, implies mobility of the labour force. This is only possible where the work is simple. Unskilled workers in general and more particularly women and immigrants thus have an extremely high mobility at the level of the branch and sector of industry, and this responds perfectly well to present-day industrial structures, showing the fundamental role played by this type of worker.

Figure 3.1 shows that, besides there having been an overall increase in mobility between 1965 and 1970 in relation to the previous period (1959-64), women are proportionately more mobile than men.

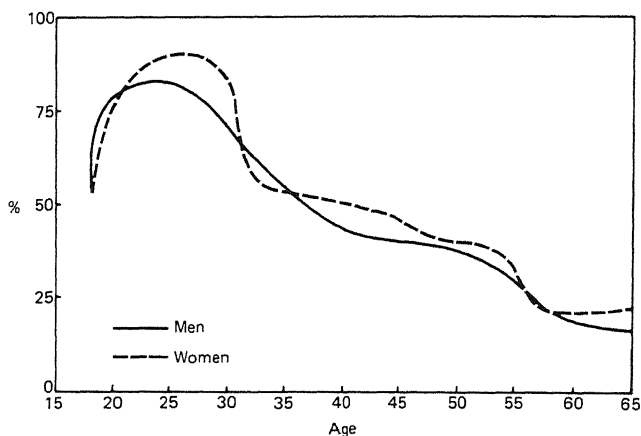


FIG. 3.1 Percentage of workers changing firm between 1965 and 1970 (private sector only) according to age and sex (France)

Source: *Economie et Statistiques*, no. 51, December 1973

The same source also indicates that when women workers change jobs, the unskilled ones among them acquire a skill in a lower proportion to men; and that they remain manual workers in a greater proportion than men or in fairly frequent cases take up jobs such as cinema usherette, hotel chambermaid, etc. Women workers in skilled jobs are less prone to stop work but nevertheless are subject to massive loss in skill level: out of 100 skilled women workers changing their jobs between 1965 and 1970, 49 went into unskilled employment.

### AN INDUSTRIAL RESERVE ARMY?

The elasticity of the immigrant and female labour force thus manifests itself in geographical or organic mobility in the former, while the latter fall back on non-productive activity, and this behaviour plays a central part in contemporary economic adjustments. Yet, in so far as this is so, does it imply the notion of *industrial reserve army* such as is attributed to these categories of workers by the majority of observers?

This point has to be discussed before we go on to study the social conflicts in which these groups have participated. It is by shedding light on the relationships that they have with the working class as a whole that it will be possible to approach an analysis of the specific nature of the conflicts involving these categories. What is more, it is not entirely without interest to examine whether we are dealing in fact with *competitors* of the traditional working class.

Let us first show how in its historical context the question of the industrial reserve army was raised. The first flow of immigrants into a capitalist sector and the Marxist prototype of the 'industrial reserve army' was the massive arrival of Irish labour into England to escape the rigours of war and famine at the beginning of the nineteenth century. After a few somewhat less than amiable remarks on the 'filth' and 'drunkenness' of these people, Engels (1969 edition: 125) affirmed that 'With such a competitor the English workingman has to struggle, with a competitor upon the lowest plane possible in a civilized country, who for this very reason requires less wages than any other'.

This judgement was to weigh heavily upon immigrants throughout the whole history of the working-class movement, and it is not without bearing on the present attitude of European unions. References to the role of immigrant workers have hardly changed nowadays: 'Immigrant labour is an important support for European capitalism. . . . The presence of immigrant workers is one of the elements that most contributes to the absence of class consciousness among wide sectors of the working class' (Castles and Kossack, 1974: 25, 30). Nevertheless, these same authors tend to contradict themselves when they note that, while capital utilises immigrant labour to lower wages and divide the working class, immigrants since 1945 'do not just fill in the gaps left in the marginal sectors such as agriculture and building construction but remain a vital part of the labour force of key industries such as engineering and chemicals', and that furthermore 'the different countries vied with each other to assure for themselves the most highly prized immigrants' (ibid: 10)

i.e. those of a similar cultural level to the host country.

The need of capitalism for immigrant or female labour is not an offensive against labour but rather a response of capitalism to the fact that the working classes have attained a certain status and refuse to do certain types of work. This interpretation was already being confirmed at the time of Engels. The English worker had acquired a level of skill (and a status) that no longer assigned him to work simply requiring physical effort. 'Thus Irish labour was essential for the Industrial Revolution not only – and perhaps not primarily – because it was "cheap" (the labour of English weavers and farmworkers was cheap enough in all conscience) but because the Irish peasantry had escaped the imprint of Baxter and Wesley' (Thompson 1967: 473).

The same thing may be said for female and child labour, used previously as the basic work-force of entire branches of industry due to the 'delicate nature' of certain jobs (light fingers being the only qualification required), just as the Irish were used because of the 'roughness' of other kinds of job.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to recognise the existence of several labour markets according to the type of manpower required and the wage levels corresponding to it. The immigrant, the female worker and the young unskilled worker fit into relatively specific types of employment not simply because the others 'don't fancy them' as is often said, but because capital has so decided (it is not the worker himself, the *homo economicus*, who organises the labour market). The theory of a reserve army of labour bringing pressure to bear on wage levels is founded here again on a mistaken idea, the idea that the labour market exists by reason of its very nature, i.e. single and all-embracing. It is thus possible to read of 'the important ideological role [played by the labour market], since it permits the concealment of *de facto* segmentation and of the way in which the employer makes different use of one group or other, whereas their role in production is often identical and always complementary' (Magaud 1968:11).

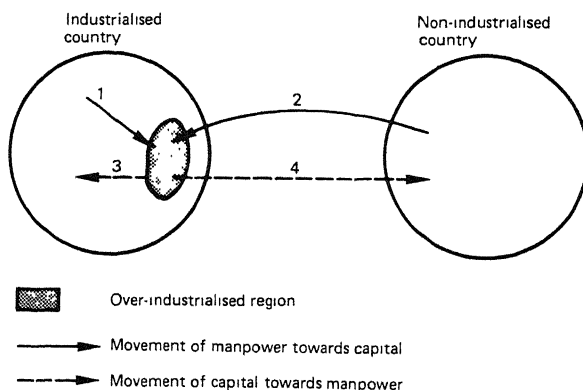
In the chapter of *Capital* that Marx devotes to the 'industrial reserve army' (Book I, Part 7, ch. 25, paras III and IV) the emphasis is placed primarily on the essential role played by these 'supernumeraries' in the dynamics of the growth of capitalism rather than their function in exercising pressure on the wage levels of the established work-force. In the face of this relative overpopulation, an offensive is launched by the workers for a reduction in working hours (*ibid.*), instead of pressure from the capitalist side, which could only take place with a docile working class. Should we not then rather interpret the history of innovations by capital as the response to a worker dynamic tending to lower the profit rate?

Even when unskilled work has become generalised, immigrant and women workers form a reserve army solely *in relation to themselves* (as we have seen previously over economic recession) since it is these groups that are in high-growth industries and that therefore are the first to suffer any fluctuations.<sup>2</sup> To say this is really to say that they are a *new working class* – though this does not mean to say that the old one has risen up the social

scale (Castles and Kossack 1973:475–6). Technicians, office-workers, skilled and unskilled workers and immigrants are of course each as much members of the proletariat as the other in that they are alienated from the means of production and occupy no hierarchical function. But this is inadequate for sociological analysis: what has to be done is to analyse the various different strata within the working class according to their different positions in the organisation of production, their different relationships with organisations (i.e. the unions), and the different types of conflict engaged, so as to show which particular groups are most representative of the direction in which capital is going at the present time and which as a corollary are most representative of the currents opposing this movement.

To see in the massive recruitment of low-skilled labour merely a means used by capital to bring pressure to bear on working-class wage levels does not take into account the evolution towards the division of labour on an international scale. The aim of 'exporting' production plants to under-developed countries has never been to create unemployment among workers in the developed countries! The trend is towards a restructuring of capital, a redeployment of industry on a worldwide scale, either by installing heavy industries for the processing of raw materials at their source, or by creating labour-intensive industries where there is a plentiful supply of unskilled labour (not to mention those industries that are prone to produce high levels of pollution). Those industries with a high rate of added value would then on the whole be developed in the industrialised countries.

The movement in search of manpower within advanced capitalism could be represented by the following diagram:



*Phase 1:* Internal migration to main industrial areas of industrial country

*Phase 2:* Immigration to these areas

*Phase 3:* Development in new areas of industrial country

*Phase 4:* Movement of capital to non-industrial countries.

FIG. 3.2 Movements of capital and labour during industrialisation

Phases 2 and 3 occur at roughly the same time. Phase 3 corresponds to the 'decentralisation' of industry (in France, towards the West, in Belgium towards Flanders, and in Italy towards the South).

The problem of the 'industrial reserve army' is closely related to what has been discussed previously, that is the position of low-skilled work in the present production structure. It was essential that a clearer picture of these two points be obtained before going on to discuss the position and role of present-day disputes involving immigrants and women.

If it is true that women and immigrants on the whole do unskilled jobs, and these types of employment are continually expanding within the system as it functions at the present time, then the role that these groups have both in production itself and in challenging this production becomes of prime importance. One cannot talk in terms of an industrial reserve army when we look at the increasing strength of this 'new' proletariat (new not in the sense that the kind of work done by women and immigrants may not have existed beforehand, but new in the sense that it has never had such an overriding position within the production process). We cannot therefore look at the upheavals brought about by these groups as regards style of dispute, relationships with the unions, etc., in a manner that simply relates what has happened, or that treats the phenomenon as something 'marginal' (this theme will be discussed later on). Their action both as unskilled workers in general and in raising demands related to their particular situation as women or immigrants means that, with the sharp rise in disputes involving these groups (even during a period of high unemployment as has been the case very recently in France,<sup>3</sup> the debate on their role as a "reserve army" is settled once and for all. A more detailed analysis should however be carried out of the significance of these conflicts and their long-term influence on social and political practices within the proletariat.

## STRIKES AND UNSKILLED WORKERS

Before analysing the distinctive character of the forms of action and demands peculiar to women and immigrant workers, we shall first examine those features that are common to them, noting that disputes involving these groups are above all ones involving unskilled workers. As such, they constitute a large proportion of those disputes involving unskilled workers that were prevalent in Europe during the 1960s, with strike demands of an entirely new form. We shall see below that the frequently made distinction between economic and non-economic demands has barely any meaning for those who actually formulate them: action against increasing work-speeds (a so-called qualitative demand) or demanding the removal of a piecework payment system (a quantitative economic demand) is one and the same thing, and the methods used to attain the objective vary according to the power relationship. What can however be considered as something new are demands that call into question the very basis of work organisation under capitalism, such as

demands for a reduction in workrate or for the abolition of piecework, or even those in favour of equal pay when directed against a payment system linked to a fixed hierarchy of skill levels. The strike demands of women and immigrants will be characterised as new to the extent that they call into question systems of work organisation as regards both conditions of work and pay systems linked to a hierarchy of job classifications.<sup>4</sup>

## THE CONTESTATION OF WORKING CONDITIONS

Actions over conditions of work that have taken place during the history of the working class have normally been directed towards obtaining various bonus payments – for dirty or arduous work, dangerous work, and high output. Recent movements by unskilled workers over working conditions have brought about a profound change in the nature and significance of this kind of demand (Laboratoire de Sociologie de la Connaissance 1973). Indeed, claims no longer rest on the payment of bonuses as compensation for bad working conditions, but tend more towards a direct attack on the conditions themselves, against ‘infernal’ line-speeds and against output rate and wage payment systems attached to output. In this sense they go so far as to constitute a *contestation* of the work organisation. It is thus that fluctuations in pay, a factor that frequently sets off actions by women and immigrants, have not been resolved by the concession of improvements in various bonus payments, but in the majority of cases have led to the link between payment and productivity being called in question.

This shows that the contrast conventionally made between qualitative and quantitative demands does not apply and that in point of fact all these aims have a basic coherence. A demand for the abolition of a payment system based on output criteria is related to profound discontent over conditions of work and work rates imposed to provide maximum productivity, while it is also directed against unequal and fluctuating levels of pay. The desire for a stable wage comes in effect to challenging a system of remuneration that is based on a fragmentary, output-orientated work organisation.

It was in Italy (October to December 1968) at the Pirelli Settimo plant and then at the Fiat plant in Turin that disputes over the reduction in output rates first appeared with the general theme of ‘la salute non si paga’ (health has no price). In France, the years following 1970 were marked by several conflicts involving women in the textile industry and in electronics aimed at abolishing piece-work and reducing work-rates (*ibid.*). In England there have been continual disputes at Ford’s Halewood plant over control of line-speeds. Though the movement has been less widespread in West Germany, the list of demands put forward during the 1973 Stuttgart strike contained demands for a reduction in output rates.

The distinctive feature of these movements is the fact that reduction in work-rates is at the same time both a demand and a specific form of action. Observers have often emphasised the fact that in this type of strike the aim is not always an immediately clear-cut one. Indeed, whereas a role of trade

union organisations is traditionally to formulate demands and select forms of action appropriate to the claims that are put forward, in conflicts of this type it is only during the actual course of the strike that the real causes of discontent are brought to light. The choice of forms of action and claims is directly related to the system of production and work organisation which just happens to be that which is criticised and challenged, often that of production-line work linked to output levels.

By thus breaking with the concept of the all-out strike, of the strike used as a means of exercising pressure during negotiations, the workers have chosen to undertake action on the work itself, by a voluntary reduction in output (as in the examples quoted for Italy and France) or, once again in Italy, by organising lightning stoppages, the end of each stoppage intended to coincide with one starting in another sector.

It is in this type of strike that the notion of 'open conflict' has appeared. Demands that have a bearing on the system of production are never totally satisfied as there is no trade-off possible, and the conflict is never more than a high point in worker militancy of which advantage may be taken. The creation of 'control committees' and 'output committees' in Italy corresponds originally with this concept of open conflict, whereby reductions obtained in levels of output have to be defended day by day.

Disputes over working conditions very often lead to the *contestation* of the system of job hierarchy, a system that places the status of the worker in an institutional concrete form. When militant action is carried out by workers collectively, this in itself challenges a system which divides groups and makes each case an individual one by means of different bonus payments and the application of countless job coefficients. An action undertaken against conditions of work involves realisation that these conditions are the same for all those who work in a particular shop, and poses the question: 'Why isn't everyone paid the same wage?'<sup>5</sup>

## THE JOB HIERARCHY AND CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM CALLED IN QUESTION

Women and immigrants have developed a type of demand which is common to numerous disputes involving unskilled workers in Europe. These are demands of an egalitarian nature and they have brought to light the difficulties that trade unions sometimes have in understanding these strikes. It is the trade union that acts as a filter between the aims as formulated and the claims that are finally negotiated; and the normal tendency is to settle the dispute by proposing a new job hierarchy scale, defining the work done by unskilled workers in terms of skill level. Examples were the strike of 800 immigrant workers at Renault-Billancourt in early 1973 and that by immigrant workers at Renault-Flins later that year. Here the demand was 'Equal pay for equal work – PiF for all' (*Temps Modernes* July 1973). The job category PiF has been created as the lowest grade in the skilled category, and was reserved for the promotion of a few unskilled and semi-skilled workers; it

was regarded by the immigrants as the final grade of the unskilled category. Such a demand therefore exhibited no desire to climb up the job hierarchy, and as such took the French unions by surprise. A similar development occurred during the Fabrique National d'Herstal strike in Belgium in April 1974, when union officials took up demands being made by female machinists in order to question the existing scale of job categories; the women themselves, by raising the demand of 'ten francs for everyone' threw into question the whole issue of wage determination based on a job hierarchy. The unions considered that the demand overstepped the possible area of bargaining (because of inflation), and transformed it into 'equal pay for equal work', thereby tending towards an opposite conclusion from that sought by the women (GRIF, 1974).

What is conventionally taken to justify wage labour and especially the job hierarchy rests on professional competence and level of responsibility. The aim of bargaining systems is to acknowledge the value of work done and skill level in terms of wages. Women and immigrants, defined as they are as *unskilled*, are unable to feel involved in this system of values. Thus the process of skill-level reduction leads the worker to lose entirely the possibility of having some control over his own exploitation. The demands put forward call in question the traditional link between wage and value of work. It is in fact no longer a question of defending one's skill level, of trading on its value, but, quite the contrary, of denouncing the system of production and demanding more wealth on a social level on the basis of being a unit of labour.

### UNSKILLED WORKERS AS A CLASS AND THE TRADITIONAL WORKING CLASS

The actions undertaken by these new strata within the working class have not often affected the traditional working class. A comparison of the strikes in West Germany in 1969 with those of 1973 shows that in 1969 it was the skilled who went on strike, while in 1973 the disputes involved the new categories of workers. Similarly in France and Belgium the various strikes involving immigrant workers almost all took place without sympathetic action on the part of skilled workers.

It should be noted however that gains obtained after strike action by unskilled workers are often 'recuperated' by the more skilled grades. In this way, the 1973 strike by Turkish immigrant workers at the Ford plant in Cologne led to a cost-of-living bonus being obtained by all workers. Similarly, the effect of union negotiations following strikes by immigrant workers at Renault with the slogan of 'PiF for all' was to readjust the job hierarchy scale to the advantage of the skilled workers.

The relative absence of representation within union machinery for the new categories has contributed considerably to the movement of spontaneous, unofficial and wildcat action. This in turn challenges the post-war evolution of institutionalised bargaining. Collective bargaining systems vary from one country to another, and unions may be more or less centralised. It appears

however that even in the case of decentralised structures such as in France, Belgium and Italy, the demands of the so-called marginal groups, which do not fall within the traditional scope of the unions, have not always been accommodated and that contradictions have become apparent between the rank-and-file and the central machinery. A feature of institutionalised bargaining is that it places discussion at a national and all-embracing level: the negotiation of industry agreements is taken out of the hands of the local or plant-level branches to the benefit of central organisations, the sole parties recognised by both the state and employers' associations as 'valid spokesmen' for negotiating purposes. Further, bargaining takes place around general criteria of a narrow technical nature, such as the national minimum wage (in France), wage classification scales and job coefficients, which by their abstract and strictly functional aspect are beyond the comprehension of the rank-and-file. This system, based as it is on mutual understanding, has direct effects on dispute activity to the extent that in certain countries it has led to the fixing of agreements of relatively long duration: three-year agreements in the Italian engineering and building industries, two-year agreements in all branches in Belgium.

## THE PROBLEM OF UNION INTERNAL STRUCTURES

The actions undertaken by unskilled women and immigrant workers have thus challenged the strategy of the trade union organisations. They have not however had the end-result of encouraging a movement against the unions themselves, as such disputes have frequently led to increases in membership due to massive recruitment from among these groups of workers. The unions in Fiat plants in Italy increased their membership by more than 30 per cent and in France each strike has been followed by a *collective* enrolment either on the part of women or immigrants. This phase of union growth during and after a trend towards more radical action has different effects on the organisations according to the state of the union movement in each particular country. It is interesting to compare the situations in France and Italy. The entry of women and immigrants into French unions occurs in the endeavour to take in these categories without modifying the content of demands or the strategy and forms of representation within the organisation. It is worthwhile noting that a union such as the CFDT, that supported most of the strikes over working conditions and piecework involving unskilled workers, rejected during its 1973 Congress the organisation of these workers into strike committees and the acceptance of demands of an egalitarian nature. Even the make-up of this Congress was significant, given that the CFDT has a large number of members from unskilled jobs: there were about sixty delegates from unskilled grades out of a total number of 1200. The way in which French union institutions have 'seized up', representative as they are of the skilled class of workers, is in contrast to the situation in Italy.

With the structural weakness of Italian unions at plant level, the massive arrival of internal immigrants on to the labour market of Northern Italy

during the 1960s enabled new structures of representation to develop by means of the *delegati* movement. While the unions found in this movement the means to reinforce their own organisation at workshop level, the *dynamic* set in motion provided a direct form of representation of these new workers by the nomination of *delegati*, the creation of machinery such as the shop-level meeting, and last but not least the development of demands and forms of action applicable to these new groups of workers that have subsequently affected the whole of the Italian working class.

The creation of a *strike committee* has often become a necessary part of organising these workers, relatively unattached as they are to the established unions. Both the CGT and the CFDT are opposed to this form of organisation in France, although the unions were behind the proposal to form a strike committee in the Renault Billancourt dept. 38 dispute. In this particular case, by choosing as a strategy one of taking over the demands, the unions avoided the organising of strike committees taking on an anti-union turn. (Cf. a committee elected in a West German Ford plant in 1973 with no trade union representative on it.) This policy even resulted in strike committee members participating in the negotiations between management and unions. In Belgium, on the other hand, the strike by immigrants at Michelin in 1970 led to the unions and the strike committee opposing one another – 'The strike was run by the committee' (Debunne 1971). This opposition occurred over the problem of the duration of the agreement negotiated by the unions and the final result was a boycott of the poll organised by the FGTB and the CSC.

Similarly the *mass meeting* is a means of decision-making of prime importance that has appeared during almost all disputes involving these categories of workers. In France the unions have often countered this by backing the inter-union representation body (*inter-syndicale*) as the sole *recognised* instrument of bargaining and decision-making, and this has contributed to emphasising the image of the union as being an institution that is an integral part of the plant, especially in the eyes of immigrants.

The example of the transformation undergone by Italian trade union institutions shows that these new groups of workers have played a fundamental part in this. It is also apparent that the consequence of the movement that tends towards a reduction in skill-level is to place this fraction of the working class in the vanguard of the working class as a whole, while the leading sector of the past (the working-class aristocracy of skilled workers) is becoming less preponderant as regards dispute action if not in worker institutions.

## THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF ACTION BY WOMEN AND IMMIGRANT WORKERS

### DEMANDS AND FORMS OF CONFLICT

One of the demands put forward by women is over the problem of *wage discrimination between the sexes*.

Sullerot (1970) has shown that 75 per cent of the workers in France who earned a poverty-line wage in 1968 were women, while in Britain in 1964 the ratio of men's to women's earnings was around two to one. In 1966 the strike at the Fabrique Nationale d'Herstal in Belgium marks the first major movement in Europe over an equal wage demand in a country where the collective agreements of certain branches had written into them that for the same work the remuneration of women was to be 80 per cent or 90 per cent that of men. The same occurs in West Germany, where the DGB quotes numerous collective agreements that imply discrimination towards women. Other movements were to develop in Great Britain, such as the strike in 1968 by women working in the upholstery shop at Ford's Dagenham works, and these were to encourage the campaign for equal pay. In France this theme has rarely been brought out as the main demand, but it has appeared as part of a package of demands.

Strikes involving both women and immigrants have often revolved around claims for *paid leave* in line with their respective situations as mothers and natives of far-off countries. Demands have appeared recently which were aimed at obtaining extra holidays in order to allow workers to return to their country of origin. (The 1973 strike of immigrant workers at Ford in West Germany started in protest at the dismissal of 300 Turks who had returned late from leave.) Similarly the demands put forward during strikes involving women often include the provision of extra days leave where there is illness in the family. The organisation of creches is also a further typical demand raised by women.

It is therefore apparent that certain demands made specifically by women and immigrants go beyond the problems raised within the plant and extend to their general social situation. An explanation of this can be found in the role played by these workers in production. As lower-skilled workers, women and immigrants are unlikely to make demands which acknowledge their role and a status within the plant. Earnings are not the reward for a function which legitimates a particular status within society but simply the (only) means of providing accommodation, bringing up children, keeping a far-off family alive, etc.

A further distinctive characteristic of female and immigrant conflict within the plant appears at the level of *forms of conflict*. These have often been of the more extreme kind, such as sequestration of management, sit-ins and picketing action. Thus sit-ins have taken place in West Germany, where they are normally a rare occurrence. The sit-in during the 1973 strike of Turkish immigrants at Fords was one of the points over which opposition arose between the strike committee and the established unions, adding to the lack of contact between Turkish and German workers and eventually smothering the strike. The more extreme forms of action are in line with a rejection of the use of the strike as a means of exercising pressure in support of negotiations between unions and the management, but for those workers outside the organisation they also constitute the only means of exercising pressure.

For immigrant workers there is a further significant factor. Their strikes

are marked by great solidarity and high levels of participation, the most obvious form being the sit-in strike or factory occupation. Strike action for these workers can never be the opportunity that it is for the resident worker to stay at home and find some refuge from work. Even an immigrant's 'home' has meaning only in relation to his work, and there is thus no separation between life at work and life outside. The hostel in which he lives or the community to which he belongs are closely linked to the factory and, during a strike, are just as likely to be the venue for deciding on demands as the factory itself. This is also a reason why immigrant workers make no distinction between problems arising inside the plant and those occurring outside, which is a question requiring separate consideration.

### INTERACTION OF CONFLICT DEMANDS AMONG IMMIGRANT WORKERS

In the agreements with those countries that are suppliers of manpower, there is often a provision requiring that accommodation be supplied with the labour contract. These clauses lead straight to the conception of the immigrant as simply a force of labour, production and reproduction being tied to the formula: work = residence permit = accommodation, and if no work, no permit and no place to live. This is the reason why labour conflicts involving immigrants are almost always urban conflicts as well.

In this way the strike of Turkish workers at Fords in Germany was over the problems of living conditions and lodging as well as working conditions. In Italy, the 'immigrants from within' at Fiat put forward the question of the worker hostels (slum dwellings with no comforts) at the same time that they raised the problem of line speeds and working conditions, while workers from Pirelli led demonstrations over accommodation and educational facilities in the Biocca district of Milan. In France, numerous disputes over accommodation facilities have been conducted by immigrants (supported by extreme left-wing groups) especially in protest against dismissals. The authorities have attempted to remedy the shortcomings that accompany too close a link between work and lodging, despite the numerous advantages attached to this (for example, its cheapness, avoidance of the need for transport facilities, scope for surveillance of workers outside work, and geographical segregation making mixed housing unnecessary). Thus, at the Usinor Dunkirk plant the authorities intervened in urban planning by creating several workers' hostels scattered intentionally throughout the town (Bercaff-Ferry and Coing 1974).

*The struggle against racial discrimination* has an effect on all other conflicts, as it is the very basis of immigrant distinctiveness. In Germany and Switzerland, racialism is disguised behind a campaign to increase the working hours of the national workers so as to replace immigrants. Such demands would be inconceivable in a country such as France, where the hours of work are the highest in Europe. On the other hand an openly racist campaign occurred in Southern France, in those areas where the largest number of immigrants

are to be found, culminating during the summer of 1973 in several deaths. This led to the MTA (*Mouvement des Travailleurs Arabes*) calling anti-racial demonstrations and widespread strike activity on the part of Arab immigrants in September of that year.

## CLASS CONFLICT AND CONFLICT BETWEEN THE SEXES

In the case of immigrant workers, there is a very close relationship between disputes extending beyond the plant and the link between the various levels of conflict that form the basis of their distinctive nature. For women, however, the question is not such a clear one.

Plant-level disputes involving women begin by covering only those demands that are to do with *work activity*. It is only during the course of the dispute and *within the dispute itself* that they become fully conscious of the repercussions that working conditions have on family life and that certain particular aspects of the female condition are brought to the surface. Hence, the choice of the kind of strike organisation and the forms of action is important to the extent that they may enable the problems that are specific to women to be expressed.

Numerous cases of factory sit-ins have led to women workers asking themselves the same questions: why should a woman not take part in a sit-in at night? Or start the plant up again? Why should a woman's parents or husband oppose it? Why should the husband not look after the children? Women workers on strike at the Coframille plant at Schirmeck (Alsace), part of the Agache Willot textiles group, left Alsace to go and occupy the Willot head offices at Lille (over 250 miles away). Some took their husbands with them, while others were left behind to look after the children (following long arguments over the role of women in society!). The Lip dispute was a high point in female militancy, with the organisation of 'female commissions', discussions on the part women would play in the dispute, and on relations between male and female workers at Lip. Yet the levels of consciousness attained and even the complete changes that were able to see the light of day did not have wide repercussions on the momentum of strike organisation.

## WOMEN AND IMMIGRANT DISTINCTIVENESS EMPHASISED: PHYSICAL CONSTRAINTS

The importance of problems of physical constitution is raised in strikes involving women and immigrants, as it is frequently an event of the 'physical accident' type that sets off strike action: possibly a fit of hysteria in the case of women, or an industrial accident in the case of immigrants. This does not imply acceptance of frequently-voiced references to 'the weaker sex'. Quite the contrary, they are based on objective criteria: as women are organised collectively to a lesser extent, they are subject to particularly intensive working conditions; and furthermore, as women feel themselves to be less fully integrated into the work situation, they implicitly reject it, and their sole way

of expressing themselves is through their own person. We know that women and immigrants are physically affected by the type of work they do: women take tranquillisers to ease nervous fatigue; immigrants are the victims of accidents in the work-place, and this has often been the cause of strikes by immigrants, who are also often a large part of the labour force in firms where the workers are prone to industrial illnesses.

Race and hence the 'physical' differences that lie behind immigrant distinctiveness may have one of two effects on the immigrant worker. He may attempt to integrate himself as far as possible, to 'turn white' by Europeanising his dress and hiding certain personal characteristics that are peculiar to his culture (e.g. moustaches worn by North-Africans); or alternatively he may use his physical nature to the full as a form of social expression, maintaining habits of dress and continuing to wear accessories such as jewellery that he would wear in his own country. The right to wear a particular piece of clothing may even be the object behind a dispute over the recognition of immigrant workers' distinctiveness. Thus Sikh bus-workers in Britain have struck to retain the right to wear turbans. Being the object of racial feeling and segregation, the immigrant asserts his own appearance and uses his own person as an expression of his social group and as a channel of action, the most direct example of which is the hunger strike. However, all that remains for those workers who do not take direct forms of action is often just a physiological reaction, obtaining through sickness a means of expression that is otherwise refused to him. 'Illness is a means of asserting "My body exists"'. North Africans appear to manifest this through neuralgic troubles (rheumatic pains, lumbago, etc.) whereas a Frenchman is more likely to be subject to internal disorders' (*Temps Modernes* 1972). Women also undergo somatic reactions. They also dispute their physical exploitation in industry as 'decoration'. When strikes have taken place in large stores and banks in France, women have rejected the emphasis on 'youthfulness and beauty' at work. This use of the physical appearance of workers has effects on job distribution: at best the older shop-assistants are often put on sections that are not very highly thought of (hardware, for example) or are used as a stand-by sales assistants; at worst they may be sacked. There are also repercussions on promotion prospects.

## INSTITUTIONAL QUESTIONS

Although union attitudes to the problems peculiar to women and immigrant workers vary, in practice they remain much the same. Those unions that define themselves with reference to the class struggle consider immigrants from two points of view. As foreigners they attach themselves politically to their country of origin, and as workers they are an integral part of the class struggle within the host country. On the other hand, unions that see themselves as having a participatory function in the bargaining process express both a humanitarian attitude towards immigrant workers and a desire

to control their arrival in order to protect home workers. In either case, the immigrant worker is in fact reduced to the role of a unit of labour, an over-exploited one in the eyes of the former, part of an extra supply in the eyes of the latter, with neither acknowledging any further distinctiveness in him. In either case, immigrants have only slight representation and their participation in decision-making is virtually nil.

As regards women, the problem is different in that there is little argument even today as to the very existence of distinctiveness. Unions are not much different from any other institution in society in which women participate though in a secondary role. When, under the pressure of disputes, the unions contemplate questioning this state of affairs, it is more often than not to confirm the conventional role attributed to women in Western society: 'The [Belgian] CSC which has made a particular effort in giving women back the place that is their due thus has many more women elected to works councils and works safety committees' (Rosanvallon 1973). 'Women, intelligent, sincere and devoted workers, are highly appreciated as collectors, shop-floor delegates or works committee members, union secretaries, treasurers and members of executive committees' (FO source, quoted in Guilbert 1974).

Women and immigrants thus remain in subsidiary positions in all the institutions of union activity, and two reasons are given for this phenomenon. The first analyses the difficulties that women and immigrants have in integrating into the union. Something which militates highly against union membership is job mobility, and both these categories of workers (like unskilled workers as a whole) change their place of work relatively frequently. Only technical staff grades and skilled workers may attain the length of service that is traditionally required for posts of responsibility within a union. In the case of immigrants, besides the question of language difficulties that is often used against them, it is their 'drifter mentality' (Gani 1972) that is most often invoked: the fact that they want to return to their countries of origin as soon as possible, or are influenced by the demands of their countries' political or religious affiliations. With women, it is their role within the family that is brought to bear: 'The responsibilities involved in union work lead to attending meetings outside working hours. Thus women workers with children or just simply married have great difficulty in reconciling family responsibilities with activity as a union militant' (CFDT source, quoted in Guilbert 1974).

Further examples could be quoted to show how difficult it is for women and immigrants to become integrated into unions; and if the problem is one of integrating these groups into union institutions *as they stand*, real, if not insurmountable, difficulties do indeed exist. Another way of analysing the situation is to look at it from the viewpoint of the rigid institutional structure of the unions themselves. Something that women and immigrants have in common is that they are different from the type of worker that has built up and that directs the trade union movement. All the evidence that points to the difficulty they have in integrating themselves into the unions comes back in fact simply to a standard type of worker or work that dominates the institution

of trade unions with no mind whatsoever to question the situation (Raway 1974).

Why consider women and immigrants simply as units of labour in order to denounce as something that runs counter to their full integration all that makes for their distinctiveness? The hypothesis can therefore be put forward that such an argument does not so much denounce the marginal status of these categories as prove the 'normality' and institutional integration of the union machinery within a system whose criteria of analysis are taken up by them.

It is still however true that the same feeling of strangeness experienced by the majority of women and immigrants when confronted with union machinery has been noted throughout Europe. Hence Castles and Kossack (1973:511), referring to West Germany, noted that 'immigrants often feel as if they are not represented by the unions. In many cases they consider the stewards as being instruments of the management.' This has also been found with regard to women (and also low-skilled workers), confused by the forms of union organisation and the kinds of demand put forward by the union. Things are even more incomprehensible for immigrants, as they do not accept any differentiation that is made on an institutional level between the different kinds of problem they have. 'As the wife of a Portuguese worker at Conflans said: "My husband's lost his job, my house has burned down, there was the flood, I lost my son . . . and the union did nothing about it!"' (Marie 1974).

Whether it is a question of difficulties in integration or of institutional rigidity, it can be noticed that all over Europe disputes involving immigrant workers and, to a lesser degree, women, often went beyond the limits of union organisation activity. We have evoked above the case of strike committees. We should also take into consideration the autonomous organisations which immigrant workers join, even though they have no legal status. They may be primarily trade-union organisations such as exist in the main in Britain. In the 1965 strike at Woolf's Southall plant it was the Indian Workers' Association that led the fight to obtain reinstatement of an Indian worker though they had the verbal support of the TUC. Almost all immigrant worker bodies reject the forms of pure trade unionism and tackle the overall political problem within both the host country and the country of origin. The attitude of unions when these organisations intervene in or create disputes is always one of reserve when it is not frankly hostile. This was the case at the Ford strike in Germany where the union virtually sought to eliminate the strike committee. In France more recently the CFDT has come out against the MTA, which has been behind the majority of hunger strikes that have taken place since 1970 over obtaining work permits and that also led to the 1973 general strike of Arab workers at Marseilles in protest against racial crimes. In February 1975 the CFDT declared: 'To strive to organise immigrant workers separately from their French comrades, as has been argued, is to raise an obstacle against solidarity, contribute to lack of understanding, and make the necessary common fight on the job front more difficult'. This attitude, which ties in perfectly well with the conception of the immigrant as a unit force of labour, over-exploited for all that, is shared by the CGT.

Independent women's organisations, on the other hand, hardly ever take part in labour conflict, even if certain groups such as the 'Marie Mineur' in Belgium and the 'Dolle Mina' in Holland have been named after pioneers in the women workers' struggle. It may nevertheless be felt that they have a real influence, even though an ill-defined one, when it is noted that the level of conflict of women workers is all the greater when militant feminist organisations exist, as in France and Italy. This distinction, while no more than an apparent one, is often shown up by the unions, once again relatively hostile in this respect. The fact that their scope of activity is not based on plant or work-place considerations is in fact an indication that work as such is rejected as being the basis of female emancipation, and that the desired aim is to extend the area of conflict to the whole question of alienation in society.

### MARGINAL WORKERS?

The analysis that we have made of conflict among women and immigrant workers shows that they are asserting themselves as actors who have a predominant role to play within present-day production and that, at the same time, they raise demands confirming their distinctiveness as women and immigrants. It is with this viewpoint that we must now look into the notion of marginality, an attribute that is most frequently applied to these categories.

First, it should be noted that increasing importance is being given to this concept, borrowed from American social psychology, which is used to describe a continually increasing number of social actors, delinquents, hippies, students, left-wing activists, auxiliary workers, etc., as and when these groups challenge the social system and in so doing reveal its true nature. The concept of marginality is defined in countless different ways according to which social categories are intended to be covered, but in fact each definition comes back to two main criteria that are used as a basis for differentiation: (i) an economic one: 'those who, in a period of economic development, do not participate in the prosperity of the other categories of society' (Delors 1971); and (ii) a psychological one: deviants who do not adhere fully to the norms within society and whose behaviour sometimes goes completely against these norms. Marginality is therefore a dictum of actors in society who define an idea of what is normal and accordingly pinpoint social categories who do not conform to these norms. There is not therefore 'marginality' but 'marginalisation', that is to say an expressed point of view and practices that render such and such a category within society marginal. The problem is thus not one of determining whether one social category or another is marginal, but one of analysing the points of view and practices that shed light on the contradictions that the dominant ideology strives to resolve.

Since the aim of marginalisation revolves above all around the corollary normality/abnormality, it takes on a dual course: on the one hand, assertion of the marginal character of a particular category and, on the other hand, assertion of the means to adopt in order to resolve this marginality.

If we look at the assertion that women and immigrants are marginals, this rests on several arguments. These categories apparently form a *Lumpen-proletariat*, a term that has also been bestowed upon unskilled workers as a whole. Leaving aside its Marxist connotations, the term expresses in a relatively normative manner the existence of an under-privileged portion of the working class, a group which is paid less, undertakes the least self-fulfilling tasks, and has less job security. This argument comes back to that of 'the industrial reserve army' which has already been analysed above (see p. 82). It is the argument that is shared by the majority of people in a decision-making position within society, by trade-union organisations and by the established authorities. Furthermore, the lowering of skill level, a phenomenon that is nevertheless a structural one that occurs throughout contemporary production, is also used as a criterion of marginalisation, limiting its extent to certain particular social categories. Hence women and immigrants (among others) are marginals because they are liable to reduction in skill level, that is to say they form the reserve army.

An opposite approach to marginalisation is seen in attempts at 'integrating' the so-called excluded groups. This is not done by seeking to remedy the expressed causes of this marginality (reduction in skill level) but by trying to abolish the groups' specific social characteristics: teach immigrants to read and write, give women the opportunity of taking up jobs reserved for men, make manual work more attractive, etc. This tendency, which alludes to the 'social problem' involved, amounts to denying women and immigrants their distinctiveness by considering them first and foremost as unit forces of labour exploited by capital on the same basis as any other worker.

We now know then that 'marginalisation' is an ideological response to the dual offensive, described above, of women and immigrants. On the one hand, the profoundly revolutionary character that these forms of action have (in that they challenge the institutional system of negotiation between labour and capital over the buying and selling of skill level) is denied by the assertion of the marginal character of the categories involved. On this point, the ideology of marginality comes just at the time when the ideology of automation (a return to the golden age of skilled production, treating repetitive and compartmentalised work as a phase soon to be left behind) is no longer valid. The call: 'the conflicts undertaken by unskilled workers are just, but this type of work is due to disappear' has been replaced by: 'behind this sort of conflict are young workers (they grow up), or women (these are special problems involving equal pay or child-minding facilities), or immigrants (they are foreigners)'. Furthermore, and this is the second aspect of this ideological response, marginalisation denies women and immigrants their evident distinctive points (physical constraints, accommodation problems, etc) by presenting them as the causes of the marginality that has to be got rid of: making women the equal of men, or integrating the immigrant worker, comes down to saying 'become normal', and to excluding any criteria which give the groups an identity of their own.

Women and immigrant workers are only marginal in relation to a certain

particular institutional system in which capital and the historical organisation of the working class use the same tools of analysis. It is just because there is an overwhelming number of them within present-day production that their struggles, shedding light on this institutional system and its inherent contradictions, have taken on increasing importance. If these various categories can be grouped together under the heading of marginals it is precisely because each in its own way denounces a normality that they reject.

## NOTES

1. Even today the electronics industry demands women workers because of the fastidious nature of assembly work. Hence in certain areas of Brittany, although there is a chronic shortage of employment for male workers, 90 per cent of the jobs in certain plants are held by women. Should it therefore be said that women form a reserve army against men?
2. In mixed countries such as France where there are both immigrant unskilled workers and unskilled workers of the newly industrialised regions, there is no competition in the labour market; there are no immigrants in the new areas. As for the immigrants in the Paris region, their wage levels are often higher than those of French unskilled workers living in the West. We cannot say that they exercise pressure on the wages of non-immigrant workers.
3. Cf. the 'Cables de Lyon' dispute at Clichy (near Paris), a sit-in strike led by a majority of immigrants (May-June 1975).
4. *Translator's note.* This is a reference to the system current in France (the Parodi system) whereby wages are established on the basis of a fixed 'scale' of job coefficients.
5. *Translator's note.* One of the characteristics of the Parodi system is the inflexibility of the job hierarchy scale. The coefficient system means that overall wage increases are applied right up the scale. This leads to a profusion of bonus payments for different work-groups and categories, while coefficients are 'bent' to upgrade or devalue the nature of certain jobs. In extreme cases, as intimated here, workers doing the same job may be on different wages.



# 4 *The Effects of Recent Changes in Industrial Conflict on the Internal Politics of Trade Unions: Britain and Germany*

RODERICK MARTIN

## THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INTRA-UNION POLITICS

The classical analysis of union politics is derived from Michels's work on Social Democratic parties and trade unions, *Political Parties* (1959 edition). According to Michels (ibid. 401), central executive domination over rank-and-file member of trade unions is inevitable, deriving from the simple fact of organisation:

. . . oligarchy depends upon . . . THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE ORGANISATION ITSELF . . . upon the tactical and technical necessities which result from the consolidation of every disciplined political aggregate. Reduced to its most concise expression, the fundamental sociological law of political parties . . . may be formulated in the following terms: 'It is organisation which gives birth to the dominion of the elected over the electors, of the mandatories over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organisation says oligarchy.'

Organisational effectiveness requires a division of labour between leaders and followers, a division resulting inevitably in increased power for the leaders, and the restriction of the rights of followers to agreeing, which they usually do, or disagreeing, which they occasionally do, with decisions made on their behalf. Organisational necessity is reinforced by the individual interest of union leaders in maintaining their bourgeois way of life, and the collective ability of leadership groups to ensure repeated electoral success. Greater knowledge, control over the processes of communication, and ability to play upon the 'need' of the masses for deference enable the leadership to persuade

the led that their interests are best served by maintaining the existing leadership in control. Elections become occasions for affirmations of faith, not democratic renewal.

Michels's argument, couched in the language of collective psychology fashionable in early twentieth-century Europe, was translated by Lipset, Trow and Coleman into sociological terms in their classic study of the International Typographical Union (1956:464):

[our study] has given additional empirical support to [Michels's] analysis of the connection between oligarchy as a political form and the overwhelming power held by the incumbent officers of most private organisations, by demonstrating that where an effective and organised opposition does exist, it does so only because the incumbent administration does not hold a monopoly over the resources of politics.

The ITU itself was regarded as a 'deviant case', oligarchy failing to develop for a number of specific historical and sociological reasons. The status of the occupation was relatively high, making loss of office personally tolerable to union leaders; the level of involvement and participation in union politics was also high, mainly because of strong commitment to the occupation; ideological as well as economic divisions existed within the membership, providing the basis for long-term, and cross-cutting, lines of cleavage; the union's constitution provided for a decentralised political and organisational structure, incorporating effective defences against executive interference with sub-group autonomy; union members were able to bargain effectively with employers at local level, mainly because of their skill and their control of local labour markets, and thus did not need to rely completely upon head-office services. In short, ideological, structural and environmental factors made it possible for union democracy to survive within the ITU, making it a rare if not unique exception to the iron law of oligarchy. *Union Democracy* has remained the single most influential work on union politics since its initial publication in 1956.

One reason for the popularity of Michels's 'law' is academic: it is one of the few propositions in social science which appears, if only at first glance, to have the status of universal proposition. A second reason is political: his conclusions correspond closely with those of the 'pessimistic' strand in the Marxist analysis of trade unionism, with obvious political implications (Hyman 1971: 14–17). For Michels, writing from a revolutionary Social Democratic perspective, oligarchy and the inevitable betrayal of proletarian interests were inextricably linked: organisational inevitability was sustained by revolutionary pessimism (May 1965). Since 1913 this pessimistic view has become one conventional Marxist interpretation of trade unionism. Unions – and more particularly union leaders – are seen as a necessarily counter-revolutionary force, whose *raison d'être* would disappear with the disappearance of capitalism. Oligarchy, collusion with employers in the maintenance of stable collective bargaining relationships, procrastinating responses to rank-and-file

pressure, and incorporation into bureaucratic state apparatus of welfare capitalism, are seen as the characteristic features of the union leader's role (for example, see Allen 1966). The iron law is an important element in this comprehensive analysis.

Despite its academic and political convenience the 'iron law of oligarchy' is of only limited relevance for understanding recent changes in the distribution of power in contemporary trade unions. In general, it exaggerates the extent of the gulf between the élite and the mass of trade union members, ignoring the leadership's dependence upon voluntary unpaid officials (especially important in view of the poverty of most unions) and the importance of opposition factions; polyarchy is a more relevant concept than oligarchy (Banks 1974: viii). More specifically, application of the iron law neglects the changes which have occurred in industrial relations since 1956, when *Union Democracy* was first published. In the mid-1950s, especially in the United States, it may have been realistic to depict central domination as the norm, with autocrats like Lewis (Mineworkers) and Reuther (UAW) in the United States, Deakin (TGWU) and Williamson (NUGMW) in Britain, and Otto Brenner (IG Metall) in Germany dominating their respective movements. By the late 1960s the situation had changed. Even in the United States, significant opposition groups had emerged in numerous unions, including the UAW, the Mineworkers, the Steelworkers, the National Maritime Union, the Teamsters, and the Painters; tensions between important locals and head office had become apparent, for example in the UAW over the significance of job control issues (Edelstein *et al.* 1970: 159; Herding 1972: 43). There is even evidence of opposition candidates winning union elections (Herding 1972: 261-2). Oligarchic domination is even less evident in European unions. Although the turnover in elected union officials has remained small, economic, normative, and political changes have reduced the ability of union executives to guarantee compliance. The iron law of oligarchy operated under specific historical conditions which have since disappeared; a more complex and less mechanistic approach is now necessary.

One more complex approach, developed by Edelstein and Warner (1975), focuses upon the role of elections in maintaining union democracy. The degree of union democracy, and by extension the power of rank-and-file members over their representatives, is measured by the closeness of election results and the frequency of the defeats of incumbent or heir-apparent candidates. Genuine electoral competition is regarded as being especially likely in unions where extensive communication between rank-and-file members is possible outside union channels, and where the union constitution provides for 'substructural autonomy'. However, this focus is misleading and too narrow: misleading because elections may be close, or heirs-apparent defeated, precisely because success provides scope for domination during tenure of office (as in the American Mineworkers); too narrow because politics is about power, not simply elections: the preoccupation with elections rather than interests which was generally characteristic of American political sociology in the 1960s diverted attention from the fundamental issue of the

bases of compliance.<sup>1</sup> Evaluation of the distribution of power within unions, and the effects of recent changes upon that distribution, thus involves examining the interests of different groups within the union, and the outcome of varied attempts to secure compliance despite resistance, not simply the tabulation of election results. What attitudes and interests provide the basis for group formation? What conflicts of interest arise? Who wins in such conflicts? What factors affect the outcome of such conflicts, and how have they been changing in recent years?

The major bases of group formation within unions are occupational interests and ideology. Among the major politically relevant distinct occupational interests within the union are those of full-time elected national officials with tenure, full-time elected national officials requiring re-election, full-time appointed national officials, regional and local full-time elected or appointed officials, branch officials, lay shop-floor officials, and ordinary members, as well as the different occupations serviced by the union. Furthermore, ordinary members vary in the type and extent of their commitment to the union and thus in the degree to which they can be politically mobilised (Tagliacozzo and Seidman 1956). Ideological differences cut across, or occasionally reinforce, occupational differences. Political conflicts can, of course, arise between any group. However, in this paper I have concentrated upon conflicts between full-time national officials and active rank-and-file members, whose spokesmen are usually lay officials (in shorthand polemical terms between bureaucracy and rank-and-file) and, to a lesser extent, between 'left' and 'right' factions within each group. A full assessment of the distribution of power within unions would require a comprehensive investigation, which is impossible here. However, conflict between national officials and rank-and-file members is widespread and a central strand in the arguments of critics of co-operative trade unionism. As such it requires detailed investigation (not generalised condemnation).

## CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS

According to Michels, at the simplest level the basic conflict of interest between union leaders and their followers derives from the leaders' interests in preserving their own bourgeois positions (and thus capitalism) and the rank-and-file's interest in social revolution: leadership roles bring material and status rewards, and thus form an investment in the preservation of capitalism. Final assessment of this conflict of interests obviously depends upon the extent of the identification of workers' interests with those of social revolution, which is beyond the scope of this chapter. In a more limited way, it is possible to assess the material and status rewards derived from union leadership, and thus the divergence of interests between union leaders and their followers.

Although there is no precise public evidence on the earnings of union leaders and officials, and earnings vary widely between unions, it is unlikely that those of British or German union leaders equal those of major American

leaders. In Britain, leaders of white-collar unions appear to earn significantly more than leaders of blue-collar unions, although the unions are smaller: the general secretaries of the National Union of Teachers and of the National Association of Local Government Officers both earn over £10,000, whilst the president of the much larger AUEW and the general secretary of the TGWU receive only approximately £6000. The earnings of German union leaders also vary, probably ranging from around 3500 marks to 7500 marks per month – significantly higher than their British peers; but German union leaders are reticent about the material rewards of office, and there are no published figures. Although the earnings are considerably below those of managers in similar positions, they comfortably exceed those of rank-and-file members, even in unions which attempt to relate official salaries to the earnings of ordinary members, like the British AUEW. There are also significant indirect financial rewards of union office, deriving from co-optation on to government and party political bodies, public corporations, or the co-determination supervisory boards in Germany, from occasional journalism and lectures, and, even more important, from the career openings which are available to union leaders as industrial relations experts on government bodies, public corporations, union sponsored commercial undertakings or occasionally even private companies. Union leadership also provides less tangible rewards – the interest and satisfaction derived from varied and responsible work, the feeling of self-importance fostered by the deference of politicians, media-men, businessmen and others, pleasant in itself and useful in reminding rank-and-file members of one's importance. The importance of such varied rewards is shown by the rarity of resignations from union office in both countries: resignations have occurred only after promotion to major political office (and Frank Cousins even attempted to retain his union office after becoming a Cabinet Minister), illness, or reaching retirement age.

The interests of union leaders, narrowly defined, may thus diverge from those of their members: they have a strong interest in remaining in office regardless of their success in achieving collective goals. But the conflicts of interest deriving from the leaders' personal stakes in retaining office are probably less important than those deriving from different attitudes to due process. Union leaders are more committed to maintaining procedures negotiated with management (and government) than union members, for their survival depends upon the maintenance of ordered relationships. The arbitrary exercise of work-group power in defiance of union policy, even when in line with the long-term aims of the union, undermines the authority of union leaders directly and indirectly, by increasing the probability of similar arbitrary action by employers when circumstances change. Hence the formal union-executive hostility to 'official' unconstitutional strikes (i.e. strikes authorised by shop stewards but carried out in breach of procedure, usually because of procedural delays), and the very real hostility shown to 'unofficial' unconstitutional strikes. Lord Carron's emotional outburst when giving evidence before the Donovan Commission in 1968 against employers who

dealt with unofficial strikers was only one small example of public commitment to due procedures, and resentment against those who betrayed them;<sup>2</sup> more significant was the general alarm of German union leaders at the unofficial strikes of September 1969, which repudiated the 'concerted action' agreements before the end of the eighteen months period they were due to run. The dependence of union leaders upon mutual observance of contracts is most evident in business unionism, where union leaders are concerned to secure the observance of agreed terms by both buyers and sellers of labour: faulty goods are likely to result in dissatisfied customers. As one official of the then NUGMW put it (quoted in Clegg 1954: 254)

It is the business of the union to sell labour, and to get as good a price as it can. The union sells different qualities of labour, and in different markets, and it must have regard to this in the bargains it makes. No businessman who wants to stay in business can afford to cheat or to press his advantage fully home on every occasion. The most successful businessmen keep on good terms with their customers and the union must do so too.

Even where unions are committed to the eventual destruction of private capitalism, the proximate aim of improving members' earnings involves recognising dependence upon employers. This commitment to due process is usually accompanied by a willingness to compromise; but it would be an oversimplification to interpret this willingness to compromise as an institutionalised tendency to suppress rather than express workers' grievances, unless compromise were equated with suppression and the statement made true by definition.

Another aspect of the contrasting perspectives of union leaders and their members is the range of issues regarded as relevant to the bargaining process: union leaders are more open than their members to arguments on general political and economic grounds – on the need to restrain inflation, to maintain investment, to protect the balance of payments, etc. One of the most explicit statements of this responsibility was the joint statement of unions, employers, and the German Federal Government on concerted action in October 1970 (quoted in Reichel 1971:475): '[the aim is] to bring about collaboration among all concerned in order to combine stability with growth, by means of an exchange of information and opinions between the Government, the Federal Bank, employers, trade unions and the Council of Experts regarding the general economic situation.' At the very least, public definitions of their role require union leaders to express formal commitment to 'responsible' attitudes, refusal to do so resulting in political opprobrium.

The commitment of German union leaders to due process is even more complete than that of British leaders. Following the failure of earnings to keep pace with rises in the cost of living in 1969, unofficial strikes broke out in September 1969, beginning at the Hoesch works in Dortmund on 2 September and spreading rapidly throughout the iron and steel, coalmining and, to a lesser degree, engineering industries. Seriously alarmed by the

extent and ferocity of the unofficial movement union leaders in the metal and coalmining industries opened negotiations. These were successful, and an 11 per cent wage increase was won on 12 September for iron and steel workers, although the existing agreement was not due to expire until 30 November, and wages and hours improvements worth an estimated 9m. marks in 1970 were won in coalmining. Despite the success of the unofficial movement the DGB commented in April 1970: 'Trade unions cannot take part in spontaneous strikes owing to the obligation to maintain peace to which they are bound. This obligation, which is imposed upon them by the fact that collective agreements are in force, is the feature of wage negotiations which ultimately fully guarantees the effective independence of the signatories to agreements.' This was not mere public rhetoric, for during the strikes union officials had devoted their major efforts to securing a resumption of work (Waline 1970:257).

The interests of union members, as union members, are easier to define in general terms than those of union leaders. Members join unions to maintain or improve their standard of living, or to increase their control over their work situation, by collective action, and define their interests in such terms (Flanders 1970:41). In addition, while most British and German unions and their members exhibit a vague commitment to the achievement of socialism, the significance of this varies, and some unions (and many groups of workers) repudiate it. One of the most militant (and most democratic) of British unions, the British Airline Pilots Association, is aggressively Conservative (Blain 1972), as of course are the very small Christian Democrat and white-collar unions in Germany; the rank-and-file members of the left-wing British Association of Scientific, Technical, and Managerial Staffs are either indifferent or hostile to the socialist principles of their leaders (Roberts *et al.* 1972). Both British and, since 1963, German unions have emphasised the limited character of their aims and objects, partly as a way of minimising internal conflicts, and in doing so have reflected the definitions of their interests adopted by the majority of their members.<sup>3</sup>

The interests of union leaders and their members thus differ, but they are not necessarily fundamentally antagonistic. These differences do not normally result in conflict, for union leaders recognise that staying in office requires at least a minimal satisfaction of their members' conception of their interests. Assessment of changes in the relative distribution of power between leaders and led requires some consideration of those conflicts that do occur and their resolution, though a comprehensive account is impossible and only illustrations can be given. In Britain conflicts over the narrow economic interests of leaders are still rare, for executive salaries are closely regulated by rule, often tied to earnings within relevant comparable occupations and thus clearly outside the scope of executive action; conflicts over the range of executive responsibilities and over appropriate bargaining tactics are more frequent. In Germany conflicts have largely centred upon wage and political issues, though organisational issues are becoming increasingly important, especially the appropriate role of the *Vertrauensleute*.

## CONFLICTS BETWEEN UNION BUREAUCRACIES AND THE RANK AND FILE

Union bureaucracies are sensitive to the requirements of administrative efficiency; rank-and-file activists are sensitive to encroachments upon local autonomy. Conflicts between the two groups are therefore inherent in the structure of the organisation. The tension between the needs of efficiency and the needs of autonomy is well illustrated, in an extreme form, in the British AUEW. For example, in 1968 the Executive wished to obtain authorisation to conclude check-off agreements with employers, but failed to persuade the lay Rules Revision Committee that it was desirable. The maintenance of close personal contact between the lay activist and the rank-and-file member was regarded as more important than organisational convenience. Equally contentious in Britain has been the issue of expanding the number of full-time officials, or the reorganisation of the responsibilities of existing ones, which has obvious political consequences. Controversy within the Union of Postal Workers in 1969 over the union's plans for the appointment of full-time district officials focused upon the plan's implications for the distribution of power between head office and lay activists – the activist delegates at the union's annual conference correctly anticipated that the result of the change would be the strengthening of the position of full-time officials. As Moran points out (1974:156) 'A small bureaucracy, confined to union headquarters . . . is likely to be much less influential *vis-à-vis* lay activists than is a large one which permeates many levels of the union.' Despite the apparent political strength of the UPW Executive's position, with its central monopoly over wage negotiations, and the obvious merits of establishing full-time officials in close contact with union members, the proposal was rejected. However, the creation of full-time posts at regional level does not necessarily increase the dominance of central union officials; the major opposition to any reorganisation proposals designed to increase the powers of central administration in the GMWU has traditionally come from the full-time district secretaries.

In Germany the needs of administrative efficiency have not received similar challenge, as the scope of autonomy for lower-level institutions has never been as extensive as in the British engineering industry. Hence, most of the major unions have a more orthodox bureaucratic pyramid than, for example, AUEW. More particularly, the full-time regional officer exerts a powerful influence throughout the *Land*, and there has been very little critical discussion of check-off arrangements, (although the check-off is declining in significance in favour of payment by banker's order as union officials are sensitive to too obvious collusion with employers). At company and plant level, domination of the supervisory boards and of the works councils by full-time officials has only very recently been challenged, and full-time officials remain the most active members of such joint committees.

The second major range of issues producing political conflict – and of more

interest to irregularly participating rank-and-file members – concerns wages. Such conflicts may be endemic, relating to the extent to which union leaders are regarded as systematically neglecting the interests of specific groups of members, or occasional, relating to specific sequences of negotiations. An obvious example of endemic conflict occurs in the British NUR, where the Southern Region railwaymen in general, and the signalmen in particular, have been at odds with the Executive for at least fifty years. In extreme circumstances systematic neglect of specific groups can lead to attempts to establish breakaway unions, for example the telephonists in the British post office (Lerner 1961: Hemingway 1976). Conflict over specific sequences of negotiations is even more common: for example, the failure of the TGWU to carry its members over decasualisation in the docks following the Devlin Report, or in Germany the disputes over the 1973 and 1974 agreements in IG Metall. Union executives can usually ensure that agreements negotiated with employers are accepted, but the above are only a few examples where negotiated settlements have been rejected or seriously questioned, and even where agreements have been formally accepted union members can nullify their effects by, for example, reducing productivity.

A third range of conflicts arises over political questions unrelated to narrow economic interests. Although unions have defined their aims in relatively restricted terms, the links between them and the Labour Party in Britain and the SPD in Germany have made it impossible for them to avoid divisions on political issues unrelated to economic interests. The most spectacular conflicts have arisen over atomic weapons in Britain and over the Emergency Laws in Germany; in both countries policy disagreements within the unions reflected divisions within the labour movement at large. In Britain, union votes were decisive both in the Labour Party's acceptance of unilateral nuclear disarmament in 1960, and in its subsequent rejection in 1961, though for most trade-unionists attitudes towards the Bomb were mainly determined by attitudes towards its major supporter, Gaitskill, in which hostility to revisionism was the major element (Parkin 1968:124–32).

The extent to which union leaders prevail in conflicts with their members depends partly upon the issues involved, and partly upon the environment within which the union operates, the institutional structure of the union, and the motivations and abilities of both leaders and rank and file in using the resources available to them. Although the lack of evidence prevents a comprehensive analysis, it is possible to discuss some of the factors involved in general terms, and to show how recent changes have affected the outcome of such conflicts. The major relevant environmental factors involved may be classified into economic, political, and normative; the major relevant institutional factors are the structure of collective bargaining, the degree of bureaucratisation, and the formal political system; the major personal attributes involved are organisational commitment, educational level, and political skill.

## FACTORS DETERMINING THE OUTCOME OF CONFLICTS BETWEEN EXECUTIVES AND RANK AND FILE

### ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Union leaders are likely to dominate their members during both periods of prosperity and those of economic difficulty; they are less likely to do so during periods of mild prosperity or mild difficulty; and they are least likely to dominate during periods of mild economic difficulty following periods of relative prosperity. The ability of executives to obtain compliance rests of course upon different bases during periods of prosperity and depression. In prosperity union leaders can obviously satisfy members' interests, as well as their own, through compromise according to agreed procedures with comparatively limited difficulty; employers are ready to concede increases with minimal resistance, confident that profits can be sustained by passing on increased costs in increased prices; rank-and-file members are ready to endorse, or passively acquiesce in, leadership action, satisfied with increases in real earnings. Such totally favourable circumstances are rare, although they were approximated to in the mid 1950s in Britain, especially in the chemical and oil-refining industries (Roeber 1974), and in Germany in the late 1950s and early 1960s, corresponding to a relatively quiescent period in union politics (see in the companion volume to the present work, Müller-Jentsch and Sperling: p. 261). They are likely to be found where: the demand for a product is inelastic; the establishment of new firms or the production of alternative products difficult; the size of the relevant product market comparatively small or consisting mainly of other manufacturers (thus reducing the political visibility of joint management-worker exploitation of consumers); and entry into the relevant occupation restricted.

Unfavourable economic conditions foster executive domination for opposite reasons. When union members are preoccupied with economic problems they are likely to have few resources or little energy to devote to union activities, and union membership declines. At the same time, union leaders are able to stress the importance of unity and loyalty as necessary means of preventing employers exploiting their labour market position, and thereby to preserve earnings. Unions organising industries operating in very tight product markets will thus tend to be oligarchic, other things being equal. The extreme economic difficulties of the British cotton and wool textile industries since the mid-1950s have been accompanied by comparatively little conflict between union executives and their members, who have been united in unsuccessful attempts to resist contraction and redundancies following the industry's failure to resist competition from foreign textiles and foreign and domestic artificial fibre producers.

The economic circumstances most likely to produce conflict between executive and rank-and-file occur when a period of rising prosperity is followed by sharp but not catastrophic decline, the familiar inverted 'J' curve

of political sociologists (C. Johnson 1968:ch. 4): hence the general difficulties faced by both British and German unions in the 1970s. A particularly interesting example of the tensions produced by mild adversity following prosperity is provided by the British printing industry.

## POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The political context within which trade unions operate obviously influences relations between leaders and led both directly and indirectly. At the most general level, the extent to which the union movement is insulated from wider political controversies affects the degree to which internal conflicts occur within the union – although the prospect of unions being completely insulated from political conflicts has disappeared, if it ever existed. Where unions are the outgrowth of political movements, as in France, or where religious tensions are salient, as in Northern Ireland, trade-union unity will be impossible. Even in less politicised movements, as in Britain, political differences occur, most obviously over the role of Communists and other extreme left-wing revolutionary groups. Communist Party members have played a prominent role in mobilising opposition groups within many leading British unions, and the right-wing press, especially *The Economist*, customarily interprets union politics as a direct confrontation between ‘moderates’ and ‘extremists’, mainly Communists. Such confrontations are especially evident in the AUEW and in the National Union of Mineworkers (especially the Scottish division). Similar conflicts are endemic in German unions, most spectacularly in IG Bau in the mid-1950s. Political divisions also affect union politics in less extreme form, for example over the referendum on Britain’s retention of membership in the EEC, when the majority of British unions rejected the Labour Government’s recommendation to continue membership, although the majority of union members probably voted for continued membership. The complications produced by the referendum campaign were clearly illustrated in the Union of Shop, Distributive, and Allied Workers Union: the USDAW Executive decided to advise the union delegation to the Special Labour Party Conference on Europe to support continued entry; the special conference decided to reject entry; despite this the Executive decided to recommend its membership to support continued entry, but its advice was rejected by the Annual Delegate Meeting at Eastbourne. The Executive was instructed to advise all branches to recommend members to vote ‘No’, though whether union branches followed this recommendation, and whether union members took any notice of it, is not known (*Dawn: USDAW News*, May 1975).

At an institutional level the political environment increases the resources available to leadership groups, and at the same time increases the likelihood of conflict with rank-and-file members. By providing material and symbolic support for union leaders, and occasionally by adapting national policies to union preferences, politicians obviously help to sustain union leaders. Hence both the Labour and Conservative parties in Britain have appointed union

leaders to part-time advisory posts within the government and within nationalised industries, and integrated them into the structure of economic policy formation, especially through the 'little Neddies' (Economic Development Committees for individual industries). For the Labour Party agreement with the trade unions has, of course, been the cornerstone of economic policy. Similarly, unions played a central role in the policy of 'concerted action' embarked upon by the 'grand coalition' in Germany in 1967, and the SPD has incorporated union leaders into economic administration. Such incorporation has increased the influence of central union officials over individual unions, symbolised by the various 'vetting' procedures established over claims by the TUC in 1966 and again in 1975; even where formal arrangements do not exist the General Council has exercised its influence upon individual unions to act 'responsibly', as in the pressure upon the building workers immediately before the second General Election of 1974. Within their unions leadership groups inevitably acquire some increase in influence as a result of this manifest acknowledgement of their importance, and by their (variable) success in influencing government policies in the direction desired by their members. Hence the attention most union leaders have paid to the successes of the social contract in their speeches to union conferences in late 1974 and early 1975, and the commitment of even IG Metall leaders to 'concerted action' in 1968. But the increased involvement of union leaders in government policy associated with the development of incomes policies has widened leadership responsibilities and weakened identification with the specific interests of members. The medium-term dangers of this were illustrated in Britain during the 1945 Labour Government. In 1949-50 union leaders supported the wage restraint policy of the Labour Government, but they could not persuade their rank and file to follow them and were obliged to repudiate the policy. By mid-1950 unofficial strikes and extensive membership discontent with wage restraint was evident in the NUM, NUR, ASLEF, ASW and AUBTW, and in September 1950 the TUC rejected the policy its General Council had earlier supported (Corina 1961). The latest sequence of incomes policies, beginning in 1972, has caused obvious tensions within the union movement as a whole (see, in the companion volume to this work, Crouch: p. 214), as well as within particular unions. In the AUEW, for example, successive National Committee meetings have rejected wage restraint, but only after considerable discussion and by narrow majorities (in 1973 one Committee declared its 'continuing opposition to any form of wage restraint' by 39 votes to 30, and in 1975 reaffirmed its 'opposition to any incomes policy having as its aim wage regulation through interference from any source' by 39 votes to 29). At the 1974 TUC the AUEW's motion condemning incomes policy and the social contract in general, was withdrawn 'in the interests of unity' by the AUEW delegation, probably acting against the union's rules. Union involvement in incomes policies through the social contract has created political problems in unions generally sympathetic to the contract, as well as in those opposed to it. The 1974 Annual Conference of the GMWU voted in favour of a resolution

condemning incomes policies which allowed 'Government interference with free collective bargaining' because they were 'unworkable', and 'unfair', and rejected a motion which appeared to criticise discussions with government which might lead to interference with free collective bargaining (GMWU 59th Congress *Report* 1974:420-6; 432-3). Widespread divisions of opinion have accompanied discussion of incomes policies and the social contract within several other unions, including the TGWU, USDAW and NUR. Since 1969 'concerted action' has created similar conflicts within German unions, where important minorities, mainly of shop stewards, have unsuccessfully demanded withdrawal from the tripartite discussions. Although the minorities have failed to destroy concerted action they have gained considerable support, and votes of over 50 per cent have been recorded against negotiated agreements.

## NORMATIVE CHANGES

Recent economic and political problems have thus placed considerable stress upon the links between leaders and led: long and short-term problems have forced leaders to participate in discussions with governments, with results unacceptable to many members. The simple fact of participation, as much as its results, has produced what critics have described as incorporation, sympathisers as political responsibility. The resulting confusion about the appropriate role of trade unions, and especially union leadership, has been reflected in the discussions over incomes policies at successive union conferences in both countries. However, even without these problems, relations between leaders and led would have been strained by the long-run working out of changes in the system of 'normative regulation', symbolised in changes in the comparative wage reference groups used in the process of wage bargaining. Attitudes towards inequalities, both of power and of reward, are the most politically relevant aspect of the normative 'environment'. Such attitudes affect leader/led relations in two ways: by influencing the general willingness to accept subordination, whether to union leaders or to industrial managers; and by influencing the extent to which wage aspirations can be accommodated within the usual procedures of collective bargaining. Although the first is in some ways the most interesting, there is little available evidence beyond managerial assertions about an increasing unwillingness to accept authority, usually accompanied by wistful recollections of 'the world we have lost', and I have therefore concentrated upon the second.

Even before the First World War the process of 'normative regulation' which had been created in the nineteenth century, based upon limited comparative reference groups and fragmented bargaining units, was breaking down in Britain: 'already before 1914 the unskilled had rejected both the rule of custom and the constraints of the market' (Phelps Brown 1973:331). This process was aborted by the economic crisis of 1921 and the subsequent weakness of workers in the face of high levels of unemployment and resulting managerial power. But since the Second World War it has been resumed,

leading to increasing 'fragmentation of normative systems', as each change produces further anomalies in a cumulative process. The extent to which a 'revolution of rising expectations', with its dissolution of customary acceptance of existing inequalities, has occurred is difficult to establish. The basic structure of inequalities in earnings is rarely challenged in negotiations, and, in general terms, the comparative reference groups chosen are restricted – hence 'the reference groups of the less well placed are limited in scope, unspecifically defined, and mildly expressed . . .' (Runciman 1966: 28; see also Hyman and Brough 1975; and Eckart *et al.* 1974). The empirical evidence upon which this conclusion is based is unfortunately dated. Since 1966, when *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice* was first published, and even more since the survey material reported there was gathered in 1961, the level of earnings increases has increased, and certainly the rhetoric of union propaganda – if not the realistic expectations of union negotiators – has widened its frame of reference to include attacks upon the overall distribution of earnings (witness the discussion of the Royal Commission on the Distribution of Wealth in recent issues of the Transport and General Workers' Journal, *The Record*). Moreover, detailed study of the operation of bargaining within the Coventry engineering industry, and within the London printing industry, has indicated the way in which choice of comparative reference groups changes according to the occupation's bargaining power: the criteria relevant for comparison and definitions of fairness appear to grow more elastic with increases in bargaining power. The comparative reference groups chosen are themselves a product of bargaining power – although of course they are still to be found within a relatively restricted range (different occupations within a factory, or the same occupations within different factories) (Brown and Sisson 1975).

Changes in comparative reference groups are only one indication of increased flexibility in attitudes, and do not themselves represent any significant change in general social values, much less an undermining of the legitimacy of hierarchy. But the process of disorder which Fox and Flanders (1969) examine, making evident the arbitrary character of wage inequalities and thus the dubious legitimacy of hierarchy, inevitably increases the difficulties faced by union leaders attempting to 'manage' discontent and satisfy earnings aspirations by conventional negotiating strategies. Such difficulties would have emerged without the rapid inflation following the oil crisis of November 1973: but the rate of inflation has increased the speed at which such difficulties have become serious.

The major institutional factors relevant to the distribution of power in trade unions are the system of collective bargaining within which the union operates, the degree of bureaucratisation of the union's administration, and the political constitution. Where the predominant mode of bargaining is centralised, the administration highly bureaucratised, the constitution allows full-time officials to participate actively in the final policy making processes, and limitations are placed upon the organisation of unofficial political activity, the union leadership is likely to dominate the rank and file. Where

bargaining is decentralised, administration personalised, full-time officials barred from active participation in policy making discussions, and no limitations placed upon the organisation of unofficial political activity, rank-and-file union members are more likely to be able to ensure leadership responsiveness.

## COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The primary goal of union leaders, to assist members to achieve improvements in wages and conditions, has historically involved both centralised collective bargaining with employers and employers' associations, district and local negotiations with groups of employers and individual employers, and servicing lay negotiations. The power of the central executive over rank-and-file members is greatest where the dependence of the latter upon the former is greatest, namely where the members' earnings are determined mainly by national-level collective bargaining. The scope of the bargaining requires strategic co-ordination by national officials, and success requires membership loyalty. The power of national officials is less where district, local, company or plant-level bargaining is important, for the dependence of the individual member upon the national executive is less, the need to accept executive strategy to ensure maximum advantage is lacking, and local leaders provide a focus for affiliation as well as the national leaders publicised by the media. (However, the power of the executive is not necessarily negligible in company and plant-level negotiated settlements: American business unionism is based largely upon the role of the International in conducting company-level negotiations.) The importance of the locus of bargaining for power relations within unions is obvious from a comparison between different types of unions in Britain, and from an overall comparison between Britain and Germany. In general, local bargaining has increased in importance in recent years, especially in Britain, with consequential political implications.

The trend away from national, centralised collective bargaining in Britain has been most evident in the engineering industries, where the expansion of plant-level collective bargaining has reduced considerably the significance of the annual round of negotiations between the Engineering Employers' Federation and the Confederation of Ship-building and Engineering Unions, although similar trends have occurred elsewhere, for example in chemicals. Although the annual round continues, the nationally negotiated component in earnings for most workers has significantly diminished. Earnings also derive from piece rates for specific jobs, from group or departmental bonuses or lieu-rates, and from plant 'over-rate' payments (Brown 1973). The extent to which such payments are negotiated by union officials, rather than by lay stewards or even the individual, varies. In some plants, especially where an explicit productivity agreement has been negotiated, union head-office involvement is important (as in the negotiations of most explicitly designated productivity agreements, including those at Fawley (Flanders 1964));<sup>4</sup> in other circumstances the union is irrelevant. For example, the union has little

role to play in piece-work bargaining, and in some circumstances the shop steward has little role either. Even where the union is involved in productivity bargaining it is the shop steward rather than the full-time official who is mainly involved, for he alone possesses the detailed knowledge of work processes. The result is an 'irreversible process of devolution of bargaining power to the shop-floor' (McCarthy and Ellis 1973:3).

Where collective bargaining is centralised in annual rounds of negotiations with single employers (as in nationalised industries) or with relatively cohesive employers' associations (like the Newspaper Publishers' Association), the power of the executive *vis-à-vis* the rank and file is commensurately greater than where the bargaining is fragmented and decentralised: increased earnings depend more upon the effectiveness of national officials. In the civil service, for example, collective bargaining is centralised in the Whitley Council, and lay officials play only a limited role; though this is changing with moves towards productivity deals for white-collar workers, and increased dissatisfaction with the lag behind earnings in private industry caused by the retrospective operation of the 'fair comparisons' principles (Loveridge 1971). Similarly, on the railways, earnings are mainly determined by negotiations between the BRB and the three major railway unions, and there is little scope for the emergence of shop-floor power. However, even in industries where bargaining is centralised the executive does not necessarily prevail; for example the one-day strike by the UPW in 1964 was a direct response to unofficial strikes in several post sorting offices (*ibid.*: 129). Moreover, where centralised bargaining is the norm local groups can easily feel that their specific interests are being neglected, as in the discontent (expressed in unofficial strikes) of Southern Region railwaymen with the central NUR and ASLEF negotiators.

Although centralised collective bargaining remains the major formal structure of wage determination in Britain, one of the major results of recent economic changes has been to undermine the economic rationale for that structure, and thereby to undermine the major function of the traditional nationally organised trade union. Even in industries with centralised procedures the structure has come under strain, on both the employers' and the union side. In the docks, for example, the tensions within the Port of London (between enclosed and down-river docks), between London and Liverpool, between the National Dock Labour Board ports and others, between different sections of the TGWU, and between the TGWU, the Unofficial Dock Liaison Committees and the NASD have produced extensive industrial conflict (Wilson 1972). Even in the Post Office, where the economic functions, the occupational interests and the bargaining structure are comparatively tightly knit, centralised bargaining has come under strain: partly from the belief by telephonists that their interests have not been adequately catered for by the UPW which is dominated by the postmen); and partly from technological change which has led to the need for authoritative discussion at lower levels – for example over the mechanisation of sorting operations (Loveridge 1971: ch 4).

In short, centralised bargaining emerged at a particular period – when unions were attempting to bring up the lowest-paid to national standards and when employers were comparatively willing to accede to such demands, provided that their competitors did the same. It also served the function of organisational consolidation for the union bureaucracy. Such conditions have changed, the structure of collective bargaining is changing, and so are the power relations characteristic of that structure.

Although the major politically relevant factor in collective bargaining is its level (national, regional or local), its primary focus is also relevant. Standard issues, like improvements in wage rates, fringe benefits, holidays, seniority rules, and redundancy questions are relatively easy to centralise. Job-control issues are much more difficult to negotiate centrally, for they vary widely with the specific character of the work process, and any detailed discussion has to be conducted on the individual shop floor (Herding 1972:223). To the extent that such issues have become increasingly important (as was the case until the economic crisis following November 1973 focused attention upon more immediate preoccupations), the power of shop stewards or other first-level union officials will increase.

## ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The centralisation of collective bargaining obviously increases the pressure for a centralised administration to service bargaining agents, although the need for this will vary with the complexity of the industries organised by the union, and decentralised bargaining could involve a significant head-office staff to service local units and provide a means for ensuring comparability. The role of head office involves routine administration, especially important in view of the role of unions in insurance and in industrial injury cases, press and public relations, and education, as well as the more spectacular ones of collective bargaining and the management of disputes. In addition, some unions permit full-time officials to belong to policy-making bodies or to attend them in advisory capacities (for example the GMWU allows the attendance of 80 full-time officials and 14 General Council lay members at its annual conference, though without voting rights: there are 397 voting lay delegates (GMWU 1974:14). Most German unions allow full-time officials to attend policy-making conferences with full voting rights, the proportion of full-time delegates usually ranging from 20 per cent to 50 per cent (Wiley 1971:23). The political significance of full-time administrators as a group is relatively small in British unions, especially in comparison with their importance in Germany. British unions probably suffer from too few, rather than too many, technical experts, resulting in poor public relations, inadequate preparation of wage claims (cf. the impact made by the Ford workers claim in 1971, prepared by the Ruskin College Trade Union Research Unit, despite its own lack of resources), and limited contact with events within individual factories. Complaints about the difficulty of getting full-time officers into individual plants, and dissatisfaction with their degree of detailed knowledge, are legion.

This stems partly from poverty – union membership subscriptions are comparatively low, especially in manual unions – and partly from distrust of professional administration. This distrust has perhaps reached its extreme in the AUEW, which spends far less on central than on local or regional administration. In 1974 the AUEW had 1,198,491 members and total funds of £11,885,880, but spent only £389,890 on central administration, compared with £884,984 on branch administration and £934,775 on district administration (AUEW 1974: 9,68,69). In short, there is little sign of the development of a large bureaucracy at most union headquarters, and the political influence of appointed ‘experts’ is comparatively limited.

The limited scope permitted to bureaucratic experts can easily lead to an underestimation of the importance of the relatively small number of full-time elected officials. The importance of these, especially where they are elected for life rather than fixed terms, is obviously considerable: they provide continuity and detailed knowledge of the rule-book and relevant case law in a situation where there is considerable turnover in lay members, both on policy-making committees and in shop-stewards’ positions. The central role played in the process of policy formation within their unions by leaders like Jack Jones (TGWU), David Basnett (GMWU), Clive Jenkins (ASTMS), Alan Fisher (NUPE), and Tom Jackson (UPW) is obvious. Also important, especially in the AUEW and GMWU, are regional officers, and in the TGWU and the NUR the officers responsible for specific trade groups or occupational grades. However, these posts are political rather than administrative appointments, and the degree to which their incumbents are able to dominate union members depends upon the extent to which responsiveness to membership wishes is ensured (by electoral defeat or by other forms of pressure), and is part of the general issue of ‘bureaucratic’ domination.

## FORMAL POLITICAL SYSTEM

Two sources of pressure on elected full-time officials can be ignored: electoral defeat and changes in the level of membership. As Edelstein, Warner and Cooke have shown for Britain (1970: 155–6), the likelihood of electoral defeat for incumbent union officials is very small, though, for example in the AUEW following the introduction of postal ballots, the number of defeats has increased. Similarly, changes in the level of unionisation are probably of little importance, except in unions expanding rapidly in newly unionised sectors of the labour force (like supervisory staffs) where fluctuations in the rate and direction of expansion might have political significance, or in unions organising declining occupations, where amalgamation negotiations become political issues (as in the printing industry). In Britain, the existence of closed or union shops (which cover approximately 40 per cent of union members) (McCarthy 1964) and the operation of the Bridlington agreement, which restricts the possibility of inter-union poaching, have reduced the effectiveness of membership changes as constraints on leadership predominance.

Much more important is the extent to which the union structure permits

the articulation of the factional conflicts which emerge within leadership groups, between leadership groups and groups of lower-ranking officials, and among rank-and-file members both over elections to union office when they fall vacant through death, retirement, or elevation to higher office, and over substantive policy questions.

Adequate consideration of this issue would involve four sets of data: on the frequency of occasions of conflict (vacancies, or issues), on the numbers of full-time and lay officials and their access to politically relevant resources (like communications networks), on the respective formal powers of centre and region or locality, on the ideological complexion of relevant electorates, and on the interrelations between the last three sets of factors. There is no systematic comparative evidence upon any of them. However, their importance can be illustrated by an examination of recent events in the AUEW, one of the most politically visible (and democratic) British unions. In 1974 there were 51 full-time national officers, all of whom were elected: comprising a president, seven executive councilmen, seven national organisers, seven regional officers, 27 divisional organisers (including one for the wagon repairing section), and two assistant general secretaries: the post of general secretary was at that time vacant. Over the period 1971-4 there were 18 elections involving these posts, five of which (the most senior) ran to second ballots (i.e. in which the leading candidate did not win an absolute majority of the votes cast in the first ballot) (AUEW 1971-4). The National Committee of the Union's engineering section in 1974 had 450 resolutions on its agenda (AUEW (E) 1974). There were thus multiple opportunities for political conflict. The number of full-time officials, compared with rank-and-file officials, is relatively unimportant, for both groups are sharply divided on ideological, as well as occupational lines. Hence the Executive Committee of seven members is narrowly dominated by 'left-wingers', whilst the National Committee is almost evenly split, as the complicated manoeuvrings over the institution of the postal ballot for national full-time officers in the union indicates. In 1970 the Rules Revision Committee (the National Committee in another guise) voted to implement the postal ballot by 26-25 with one abstention; the Executive Council dragged its feet over implementing the decision; the re-called Rules Revision Committee in 1971 reaffirmed the decision by 27-25; the same committee, in 1975, reversed its decision on the casting vote of the president, after splitting 26-26. This reversal has since been challenged in the Courts and the issue is still (August 1975) unresolved (IRIS 1973). The ideological differences existing within any union are more apparent in the AUEW because of the wide publicity given to election results by the union and by journalists interested in union affairs, and by the extent of substructural autonomy granted to district committees, who are constitutionally empowered to negotiate with employers and to organise district-wide or factory strikes (Edelstein 1965:116). It is impossible for the National Executive, even if it were united, to discipline district committees which differ from them ideologically. Such separatism, which permits district-level officials to establish a permanent base whilst gaining national

exposure, provides the basis for effective political conflict: different ideological groups become entrenched in different district committees, which appear to survive changes in personnel. For example, both the Sheffield and the Manchester district committees have long been predominantly left wing, whilst Teeside has sometimes been 'moderate'. Although the internal politics of other British unions are less visible than those of the AUEW the types of structural factors which help explain the distribution of power within that union are also relevant in explaining the distribution of power in other unions.

Variations in the administrative and political structures of unions, and the environments within which they operate, condition but do not determine the distribution of power between leaders and led. They can make it more or less difficult for union leaders to 'control' their members, or for rank-and-file members to ensure responsiveness. For environmental and institutional reasons it is much easier for the leaders of NUPE to control their members than it is for leaders of the AUEW. However, the outcome depends upon the motivations and abilities of the respective parties to use the resources available to them. Hence, even where the union structure and the environment combine to strengthen the hands of union leaders, they can fail to take their members along with them, as the unhappy story of the handling of decasualisation by the TGWU clearly illustrates. Similarly, rank-and-file members can effectively abrogate their influence, even when the structure facilitates it, by taking only a nominal interest in union affairs (as in the ETU during the 1950s). Part of the explanation for such patterns lies simply in the political abilities of either leaders or activists. However, the likelihood of such abilities being present depends partly upon the degree of organisational commitment of the union member, his readiness to interpret that disposition politically, and his ability to transform that disposition into effective action. Commitment depends upon whether the union is important to the member as a social or economic institution. In some occupations the link between occupational communities and the union provides a basis for commitment, for example printing (Sykes 1967; Lipset *et al.* 1956); in other occupations the union may be an essential means of exercising economic power, as in electrical contracting. This commitment is not necessarily the result of occupational status: London busmen have a high degree of commitment to the TGWU.

Whether this commitment is interpreted in politically relevant terms or not depends upon the extent to which the members' expectations of the union can be fully met at local level, without involving the union above shop-floor level. Studies of shop-floor attitudes towards unions have shown that it is frequently identified with the shop-floor organisation. These limited horizons are further indicated by the low level of participation in union elections, though higher levels of participation are of course shown in strike ballots. Such orientations have ambivalent consequences for union politics. On the one hand, indifference appears to permit union leaders to ignore their members' interests, increasing oligarchy. On the other, opposition groups operate extensively even in unions with low levels of participation, and put effective pressure upon leaders well aware that disregard for their members' interest

will enable opposing groups to mobilise support among the usually quiescent majority. Moreover, the identification of the union with the shop floor obviously provides a basis for shop stewards to act independently, usually simply ignoring but sometimes defying the national union headquarters. The result of this identification of the union with the shop floor is an uneasy relationship between shop stewards and national union officials, with the latter fearful lest the former should transform themselves into a political movement above the plant level, and thus threaten their own position directly: hence their sensitivity to attempts by shop stewards to form themselves into combine committees, as in the movement in the early 1960s among Ford shop stewards (Ford Shop Stewards Committee, no date). However the threat to union officials is less than they fear, for the stewards' preoccupation with local issues (the foundation of their support) makes combination difficult, and in any event they lack the resources to organise national meetings.

The ability of the union member to succeed politically depends largely upon the environmental and institutional factors discussed earlier. However, the preconditions for taking advantage of a favourable situation include knowledge of the union's political system, and the ability to communicate that knowledge. Knowledge depends partly upon the member's general political awareness, likely to be at least partly related to the educational level required for the occupation, and partly upon the effort made by the union to increase membership awareness. Both British and German unions have increased their expenditures on education, especially for shop stewards and other plant-level officials, both directly and through the TUC and the DGB. In Britain, the provision of educational facilities is increasing, but from a very small base: the TUC's expenditure on education increased from £156,934 in 1968 to £207,826 in 1973, but the amount remains less than that spent on affiliation fees to international organisations; the GMWU, the POEU and the NGA are among the more education-conscious unions (Taylor 1975). In Germany, educational expenditure by the DGB has risen significantly in recent years, and unions like IG Metall have extensive educational facilities.

Translation of awareness into political action within the union depends upon the scope for interaction with other union members within the plant, and upon the opportunities for contact with active members in other plants (Cook 1963). Within the plant such interaction depends upon the over-lap between the organisation of work tasks and the distribution of union members, the scheduling of break-times, etc. Between plants contact depends initially upon the relation between plant and branch organisation, and the extent to which the branch brings together active members from different plants: the geographical organisation of branches characteristic of most unions may reduce the overall level of participation in union affairs, but increase the political effectiveness of the participation that does occur. Full political effectiveness requires the translation of this concern above the local level, through the circulation of broadsheets and the organisation of regional and national conferences. It is this type of activity that is obviously assisted by

external political groups, especially the Communist Party, and which receives most criticism from union leaders. However, without such contacts the possibility of transforming localised grievances into coherent political action is small.

## CONCLUSION

On the basis of detailed examination of the German SPD and trade unions Michels concluded that oligarchy was inevitable in formally democratic socialist institutions. Although Michels himself probably intended his interpretation to refer only to revolutionary socialist organisations, subsequent writers have extended its scope to all left-wing organisations. Examination of trends in British and German unions suggests that this general conclusion is not justified and does little to help in explaining recent changes in the internal politics of trade unions. The degree of oligarchy within unions depends on the economic and political problems they face, the structure of the union political system and administration, and the norms and values of union members. At the very least, public expectations that unions will act democratically inhibit union leaders from repressing opposition too obviously and, on critical occasions, can lead to direct legal intervention in union politics (as in the ballot-rigging case in the ETU in the 1950s (Rolph 1962), and the recent controversy over representation at the AUEW National Committee). However, public expectations constitute only a very diffuse defence against repression, and legal intervention is an expensive and clumsy means of securing members' liberties, usable only in extreme situations. More important is the extent to which union members and lay officials are able and willing to act as a system of constraints upon the power of central officials. The probable effectiveness of such a system depends upon the context within which the union is operating, the problems posed for union members by that context, the union's organisational structure, and members' political motivations. These issues have been dealt with in detail earlier: only general comment is necessary here.

One factor in the social context of the SPD which Michels neglected was the extent to which the need for discipline in the face of external hostility itself helps to sustain oligarchy: the need for strong democratic centralism within Communist parties is an obvious reaction to this need for discipline. Similarly, unfavourable economic circumstances reinforce the predominance of union leaders by placing a premium upon loyalty and by increasing the tactical benefits of centralised collective bargaining. Favourable economic circumstances can also increase the power of union leaders, simply by facilitating membership satisfaction. However, recent events in both Britain and Germany have shown the difficulties of both relative prosperity, and, especially, of weak depression following upon prosperity; the disappointment of expectations leads to discontent, but not to fatalism. Such direct economic factors are reinforced by the political problems posed for unions by successive

government attempts to solve economic problems by the adoption of incomes policies, and the replacement of 'free' collective bargaining by more direct wage policies. As has been pointed out elsewhere in this study, the result has been tension between unions and government and within the union movement in both countries. Most union leaders have, until very recently, recognised that long-term organisational survival as well as (in most cases) short-term economic advantage depended upon free collective bargaining. However, increasing recognition of the extent of the current economic crisis, and the specific fears of unions organising relatively low-paid and poorly organised workers, have led some of them to countenance incomes policies if applied flexibly: hence the support for 'concerted action' even among the leaders of IG Metall, and the current willingness of even the TGWU to support a strengthened social contract. The result of the adoption of incomes policies has inevitably been to increase the pressure towards the incorporation of trade unions into the machinery of the welfare state. The power of union leaders has been further modified by changes in the system of 'normative regulation' within industry, partly caused by technological and market changes, which have led to unstable relativities and consequent resentment. Accompanying this disorder has been the adoption of a more flexible and instrumental orientation towards comparative reference groups, a tendency to extend definitions of fairness and the customary 'rate for the job'.

The effect of such changes has been reinforced by a drop in the politically acceptable level of unemployment, sometimes misleadingly referred to as full employment. The overall levels are less important than the levels to be found in specific local labour markets; in some sectors of the engineering industry in both countries labour demand has exceeded supply more or less continuously since the Second World War. Most obviously, this has transformed the balance of power between specific groups of workers and employers. But it has also encouraged the process of devolution of collective bargaining, for maximum advantage could be gained by exerting power in specific local labour markets. Specific groups of workers, especially in the engineering industry in both countries, have been able to push significantly ahead of others, beyond the levels achievable by national collective bargaining. In Germany this has reinforced the pre-existing reliance on regional bargaining and led to substantial local increases in earnings above the union negotiated levels; in Britain it has led to an even more complex, decentralised system.

Such changes have inevitably affected the distribution of power within unions, creating in Britain a dual system of unionism, at plant and at national level. (This tendency is especially marked in the engineering industries, but applies to a lesser degree elsewhere.) Hitherto the two systems have coexisted relatively peacefully: the national system negotiating national minimum rates and general terms and conditions of employment, bonuses and piece-rates being negotiated at company and plant level. The preoccupation of stewards with events within the factory helped to sustain this dualism. However, this coexistence has always been uneasy, national union leaders being fearful lest plant-level leaders should combine to challenge their leadership; hence the

special hostility of union executives to combine committees among shop stewards. Moreover, the tendency of union members to identify the union with the local steward undermined the national leadership's credibility in its discussions with the government and employers. Recent moves towards incomes policies have posed a serious threat to this coexistence, for they have led union leaders to take much more interest in detailed plant-level activities if the policy is to be made effective: a policy of coexistence based upon limited interaction becomes impossible. Moves to create a more 'rational' system of wage relativities will inevitably involve central union bodies in plant negotiations, with resulting threats to the power of stewards within their own territories. The result will inevitably be an increase in intra-union political conflict. If successful it would involve a move back, towards the situation posited by Michels.

It is impossible to predict the significance of such changes for the distribution of power within trade unions in the long term. However, there are interesting parallels between current events and those in the British engineering industry during the period 1915-22 (Hinton 1973). Signature of the Treasury Agreement in 1915, involving the suspension of strike activity, led to the development of the first Shop Stewards Movement and, in 1917, an unprecedented wave of strikes. In an attempt to control the situation the AEU urged the government to control munitions profiteering, and attempted to incorporate stewards more effectively into union organisation. This incorporation was only partially effective, and the stewards remained an effective political force, merging first with the National Workers Committee Movement and subsequently with the National Minority Movement, a Communist-dominated national movement of left-wing unionists (Martin 1969). For reasons outside the scope of this paper the movement did not succeed in providing a long-term challenge to orthodox union leadership. The depression beginning in 1921 undermined the shop-floor position of the stewards' movement, and the union's weakness was rubbed in by its defeat in the 1922 engineering lockout. But the issues raised by the first shop stewards movement were repressed, not resolved. They have re-emerged now.

The iron law of oligarchy is more relevant to the analysis of German unions than to British. Willey (1971) has claimed that German unions are democratic, or at least as democratic as the United States political system (obviously a less stringent criterion). German unions are seen as fulfilling three different criteria for democracy: multiple opportunities for participation in the electoral and legislative process; capacity to use other sanctions (unofficial strikes, violence, ceasing membership); and leadership responsiveness. Hence, for example, under the first criterion, German unions are seen as providing multiple centres of power, with 16 independent members of the DGB, significantly independent district organisations within each union and the DGB, and the local and plant-level organisations, as well as participation in the supervisory boards in the iron and steel industry. However, the significance of electoral provisions is small in view of the infrequency of contested elections; very few decisions are challenged within policy-making

bodies (which in any case meet very infrequently, quarterly at district level and only every three or four years at Federal level); and the involvement of full-time officials at all levels of the political process significantly exceeds that in Britain. It is surely stretching the 'law of anticipated reactions' too far to argue that the small number of executive proposals contested is necessarily because they are in accord with the attitudes of convention delegates (*ibid.*:22). It is equally perverse to argue that the high representation of full-time officials at union conventions is likely to increase democracy because prospective loss of earnings will make full-time officials more fearful of losing their positions than lay delegates, and therefore more responsive. Fear of loss of earnings will naturally lead full-time officials to use their expertise, and already powerful position, to maintain or enhance their positions, as indicated in the very low turnover of full-time officials. Moreover, the incorporation of German union officials into the political system has proceeded even further in Germany than in Britain. This is shown in the number of union representatives on SPD advisory committees. (Throughout the post-war period over 10 per cent of the members of these committees have been union officials; at state and local level about 60 per cent of union officials were SPD members holding one or more government positions.) It is also shown in the number of DGB members in the *Länder* and Federal parliaments (in 1972 91.3 per cent of the Bundestag SPD fraction were also DGB members); and in the concordat between the trade unions initiated in 1967 and subsequently up-dated (Willey 1974: 43-5).

Even in the 1960s the links between union officials and their members were weak: union leaders were taken aback by the outbreak of strikes in 1969. The fundamental DGB attitude towards union officials at plant level has normally been one of central domination, with lower officials providing information but not exercising decisive power. Although the DGB has established community-level organisations, they have remained, like their nearest British equivalent the trades councils, largely 'talking shops'. Within individual unions, the role of plant-level officials is similarly marginal, as they are primarily concerned with minor issues like the date and place of payment of wages. Wages and hours are negotiated elsewhere. The system of co-determination has had only slight effect in leading to the effective devolution of power; in 1969 the strikes were disproportionately concentrated in iron and steel and coal, industries of course with the most extensive system of co-determination. Despite these long-term trends towards oligarchy there are recent signs that the tensions of a dual system of industrial relations are beginning to emerge in Germany, as in Britain: the effective power of officials over works councils may be weakening, with more challenges to officially sponsored electoral slates, and with significant votes against executive recommendations.

## NOTES

1. In the British NUPE rank-and-file activists *opposed* the election of district officials, as it would increase their power by adding electoral legitimization to *de facto* influence.
2. In its evidence before the Donovan Commission the AEU contemplated supporting the outlawing of unofficial strikes in exchange for the closed shop: '[If the closed shop were granted, unions] would probably agree to outlaw for ever unofficial strikes.' (*Minutes of Evidence*, No 24, p. 936; quoted in Crouch 1975: 343.)
3. The ambivalence shown by British unionists in their attitude towards the political levy illustrates clearly the limitations of their perspective (Richter 1972). In Britain, events since February 1974 have probably extended the scope of members' definitions of relevant 'interest', but no specific evidence is available.
4. For a striking example of the problems productivity bargaining posed for unions, see Roeber 1974. Although the AUEW signed the national agreement, its North East District Committee and the shop stewards in the plant rejected it. The disagreement between different sections of the union lasted six years.

## 5 *Centralisation and Decentralisation as Tendencies of Union Organisational and Bargaining Policy*

RAINER ZOLL

A COMPARISON OF UNION STRUCTURES AT SHOP-FLOOR LEVEL IN ITALY AND IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY.

### THE THEORETICAL APPROACH OF THE COMPARISON

At first glance there would hardly seem to be anything less comparable than the situation of the unions in the Federal Republic of Germany and in Italy. In the former country, there is a unitary organisation for blue- and white-collar workers; in the latter, three different, politically oriented unions. In the former, a union structure which has remained nearly unchanged since the establishment of the DGB in 1949; in the latter, a dynamic of division and reunification which has by no means reached its conclusion. In the former, a degree of legal regulation of labour relations that is not to be found anywhere else in Western Europe; in the latter, a militant working class that, in the 'Hot Autumn' of 1969, swept away all regulations similar to obligations for industrial peace, which had anyway only been introduced by a recent labour contract. In the former, the right to strike is granted only to a recognised group of workers; in the latter, it is a right of the individual worker. This list of differences could easily be expanded, but more important than such considerations is the conspicuous difference between the social movements in Italy and in the BRD.

Italian labour relations are characterised by a high degree of conflict: between 1969 and 1972, 1794 working days per 1000 workers were 'lost' in Italy, as a result of strikes and lockouts: in the BRD, only 73 days (IG Metall, 1973: 55.) However, the Italian cycle of labour struggles in the 1968-72, does find a weak analogy in the industrial conflicts of the years 1969-71 and 1973

in Western Germany; these conflicts indicate—on a different qualitative and quantitative level than in Italy—a multiplication of labour disputes in comparison to the years 1965–8 (*ibid.*: 54; Jacobi et al. 1975:272). The economic background of the class struggles in Italy is also essentially different from that in Western Germany; the course of economic development in the two countries is not synchronic; thus, while a recession began in Italy in 1965, in the BRD it did not begin until 1966/67. Trends toward the international adjustment of cyclical development have only lately appeared. Above all, however, Italy is characterised by the contrast between the industrial North and a South which is comparatively quasi-colonial.

That one can compare the situation of the unions in Italy and in the Federal Republic results from the parallel lines of argument in discussions over centralisation or decentralisation of collective bargaining as well as over the organisational structure. This discussion was initiated in both countries by a far-reaching centralisation of collective bargaining in the post-war years, which had its correspondence in a centralised structure of organisation. In view of the other differences, the similarity of the arguments that have been presented during the debates on bargaining and organisational policy is astonishing. There is not another Western European country in which one could find a comparable initial situation and similar argumentation.

This similarity makes possible a study of the relationship between workers and union, as this relationship exists at that point where the union machine and the rank-and-file meet: namely, in the shop-floor structures of the union. The comparison throws light on the meaning of these structures in the workshop and in the union; it must refer to the level of theoretical analysis and discussion as well as to that of practical union policy. In addition, the factors which play a role in the changes in union policy or which are expressive of these changes, can in this way be determined.

First, however, the theoretical framework within which these factors for change, as well as union policy in general, are to be handled, must be defined. Unions are not the general representatives of workers' interests in every societal formation, but they are primarily a sales agency for the commodity of labour under capitalism. The wage worker can survive in the 'general competition' between wage labour and capital (in which he is structurally disadvantaged) only if he builds coalitions: i.e., in order to carry out the competitive struggle with capital, workers limit competition among themselves. Unions are, therefore, a necessary form of organisation for workers under capitalism; they are an instrument of this competition, and, thus, they are also a part of the relations of capital, which must be understood as a societal relationship.

This initial definition of unions is much more than the simple statement that they exist under capitalism. It recognises the primary task; the defence of the workers' interests in their form as the commodity of labour power; i.e., their collective bargaining, as a function *within* capitalism. In the fulfilment of this task the unions move on the surface of capitalist society upon which the real relations that are basic to capitalism only show themselves in inverted

phenomenal forms. Marx called this union activity 'the struggle within the wage system'; however, he postulated that the union should progress from the skirmishes in capitalism to the fight against the wage system itself. His postulate has its foundation in the analysis of the 'dual character of the union' (Zoll 1976). By organising workers for the competitive struggle under capitalism, the unions become the 'actual class organisation of the proletariat'. Marx saw in this the first step towards the constitution of the workingclass as a class for itself [*für sich*]. As a potential class for itself, the workingclass breaks away from the restraints upon activity on the surface of capitalist society and raises a claim to social power with the goal of abolishing capitalism. However, the workers only become conscious of their interests that transcend the system if they come into conflict with capital in the pursuit of their interests as a commodity and when such conflicts disclose the incompatibility of the workers' real interests, as those of a workingclass, with those of capital. As a rule, the unions will progress to the 'struggle against the wage system' or become open to anti-capitalistic demands and struggles only when the workers themselves become conscious of this incompatibility.

In the 'Hot Autumn' of 1969, and in the succeeding years, the Italian unions became open to anticapitalist demands and struggles, whereas the West German unions – despite all the programmatic social criticism – limited themselves in their practical politics to tasks that were immanent to the system. The Marxian demand that the unions should not stop at these tasks, but instead should progress to the struggle against the wage system, remains on the level of a general designation as long as the mediation between these functions realised has not been in a concrete, historical situation. The relationship between these two levels of union struggle – within and against the wage system – is the concern of this comparison of shop-floor structures. For a comprehensive explanation of the cycles of labour struggle and their differentiation, a study of the specific stage of development of the capital relationship would be necessary; one would have to make a general politico-economical analysis of each nation and study its specification for the level of the union. The present paper limits itself instead to the question of which factors of organisation and bargaining policy are characteristic of one or other form of union policy.

It is typical of the official union standpoint in the BRD that organisational questions are seen as technical problems and that a conscious organisational policy does not exist as a part of union policy. The relationship between collective bargaining and organisational structures, at least those of the shop-floor bodies of representation, is given expression only by the opposition within the unions. This situation corresponds to the nearly unchanged structure of the West German union since 1949; they have at the most been altered solely in the search for greater efficiency. By comparison, in Italy, the growing recognition of this relationship is plainly a part of union development. Since the early 1950s, the necessity of the connection between collective bargaining and organisational policy has been continually emphasised. But, in Italy also, the realisation of the demand that organisation and bargaining

policy be directly related to one another came only at the end of a lengthy development.

As the sales agency of the labour commodity, the unions first act on the level of the market, their basic concern is for the enforcement of the value of the labour power commodity: that is, wages. However, the exchange between capital and labour does not take place just as a formal act on the level of circulation. The concrete execution of the exchange is, for the worker, the expenditure of his labour power within the production process. Thus, the unions miss their calling if they do not include the concrete conditions of the expenditure of labour power in the production process as an element of the conditions for the exchange. This takes place in the workshop; therefore, the unions must be present on the shop floor.

The organisation of the workers in unions is a step towards consciousness of the class situation; the organising process is simultaneously of consciousness. Union organisational policy has in this respect eminent political importance. The reorganisation of the Italian workingclass in the years between 1968 and 1972, has therefore been correctly interpreted as 'the process of building class consciousness, i.e., as the constitution of the class "for itself"' (Pizzorno 1974: 9). Workshop organisation is necessarily the starting-point of a conscious union organisation policy. Despite the diverse context of the unions, there are many parallels in the discussions concerning the German shop steward (i.e. *Vertrauensleute*) movement and the Italian delegate movement and their structures. These discussions have no counterpart in France, and the differences from the Anglo-Saxon shop steward are quite large. In addition, the connection between organisation and bargaining policy in the function of the delegate as well as of the shop steward has been discussed in the two countries on similar lines, though the disputes have been differently resolved.

## CENTRALISED COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Following World War II, a centralisation of both organisation and bargaining took place in both countries. While the process still had to be completed in the BRD, it was practically achieved in Italy with the foundation of the unions. Even before the end of the war, representatives of the three large political parties of Italy (the Christian Democrats, the Socialists and the Communists) had agreed to the creation of a unified union. Negotiations began in autumn 1943, and resulted in the 'Declaration of the Realisation of Union Unity' (later called the 'Pact of Rome'). This was signed in June 1944 by the union representatives of the three parties (Albers 1974: 125). It lasted until 1948.

The introduction of minority protection at all levels of the union hierarchy was important for the further development of the Italian unions, especially for intra-organisational democracy. Minority protection has continued practically up to this day to guarantee the existence of the *correnti*, i.e., of 'currents' oriented toward party politics but organised below the level of political

factions. Further, in accordance with the declaration, local and regional divisions of the union federation (CGIL) were established in all Italy: even in those areas where the union was still in the underground. In January 1945, the first federal congress was held in Naples. The centralisation of bargaining policy had already been enforced by this time, since the statute placed all decisions on labour contracts in the hands of the federal executive: 'Since each collective labour contract may represent a good or bad precedent for all the union organisations, individual unions are pledged to present their lists of demands to the CGIL for approval before the unions sending them to the appropriate employers' associations. The federal executive will bring each list of demands into agreement with the needs of other individual unions and with those of the movement in general' (Art. 55 of the statute). Art. 56 provides for a similar decision-making process on the local and provincial levels (Accornero 1974: 84). In practice, centralisation went even further than the provisions of the statutes might indicate (Albers 1974: 132). The CGIL justified its negative attitude toward any decentralisation by reference to the class character of the union and to the necessity of resisting corporate and shop-floor-centred tendencies. The economic and social situation of the post-war era greatly contributed to this; improvement of the lot of the unemployed and of the general situation of the workers was of primary importance (Albanese *et al.* 1973: 15). The orientation on the general interests of the working class led in the area of organisational policy to the neglect of the vertical structures of the unions in favour of the horizontal; these also had priority in bargaining policy over the local and regional interests of the individual unions.

From the study of the discussion within the unions during the post-war years in West Germany, one could receive the impression that the question of centralisation or decentralisation was an object of serious conflict. In reality, the disputes were concerned only with the location of centralisation: within the strictly centralist concept which had initially dominated the discussion and was supported by many Social Democrats and the Communists, all power was to rest with the federal executive. This model was relatively similar to the present structure of the CGT in France. The federative-centralist model, which was finally adopted, centralised power instead in the executives of the constituent industrial unions that were granted important autonomy in matters concerning collective bargaining and finances. Centralisation in this form has a long tradition within the German unions; it goes back to the period of their re-establishment following the annulment of the Anti-Socialist Law in 1891. The actual source of the executive's power was its financial autonomy. The introduction of strike support could not fail to contribute to centralisation: as a rule, the bodies of representation of one region or branch would never approve, if, without their approval or without a central vote, colleagues in other regions could lay claim to the strike fund and eventually even empty it. Therefore, the decisions concerning the start and end of labour conflicts were made dependent upon the decision of the executive (D. Schneider 1971: 32; Enderle 1932: 77).

In the founding era of the post-war West German unions, wage policy was of hardly any importance due to the wage stop which was not abolished until autumn 1948. Following the constitution of the BRD, the DGB was established in 1949; its main activity was concerned with the reformation (*Neuordnung*) of the West German economy – not with wage policy (Pirker 1960, E. Schmidt 1970, U. Schmidt and Fichter 1971, Huster 1972). Only after political efforts had failed did the unions turn to their original field of activity which they had abandoned either perforce to the decrees of the Allied Forces or (as is explained by the history of their restoration) to the works councils. At that time, although the formally centralised structure of collective bargaining had been created on the union side by the appropriate statutory provisions, in practice, the central concern (before the centralisation as established by the statutes could become reality) was to enforce periodic rounds as the principle for collective bargaining. ‘This was the result of hard contract and labour struggles, in which the resistance of the employers to wage increases had to be overcome. The economic situation was beneficial to the attitude of the employers’ (Bergmann *et al.* 1975:185). Instead of supporting their own efforts for economic reform with struggles on the wage front, the unions held back at first in the hope that productivity increases would be passed on to the consumers in the form of price decreases. As the unions then did enter into conflicts for wage increases, they were weakened by their defeat on the socio-political level.

The bargaining rounds in the first half of the fifties were as a rule carried out as regional conflicts. Nevertheless, the difference between central bargaining rounds and regional ones, i.e., those, led by the regional leadership but guided by the federal executive, often became the object of disagreements within the unions. It was, in reality, scarcely perceived by the workers on the shop floor, and this is the level of activity with which we are concerned. This is particularly true when – as in the metal industry – the negotiations dealt with large districts containing hundreds of thousands of workers. Both central and regional are under such conditions centralised activities – but with the major difference that even one of the largest industrial unions, IG Metall, is practically incapable of striking on a national level given the condition of having to pay strike support to its members. A central strike of only a few days would lead to the union’s bankruptcy.

Collective bargaining in the years 1951–6 was, particularly in the metal industry, ‘truly’ regional in the sense that the influence of the executive was only informal, even though its approval did have to be attained for the termination of agreements, for strike referenda and work stoppages. At that time, the individual regional results were quite divergent. In particular the totally inadequate regional contracts (many contract referenda secured merely the percentage of votes required by statute for acceptance of the agreement, i.e. 25 per cent but not a majority of votes), and the deficient co-ordination of the regional activities led, after 1956/57, to the actual centralisation of bargaining policy in the executive of the individual unions. In particular the criticism of the management and settlement of the strike in

the Bavarian metal industry in 1954, which was not begun until after the peaceful settlement of contracts in other contract bargaining districts, intensified the centralistic tendencies (ibid. 187; Schmidt, R. 1975). The centralisation of the negotiating levels on the part of the unions was encouraged by the process of concentration and centralisation of capital which characterised the economic recovery in Western Germany (and in Italy), and by the concentration of negotiating powers on the part of the employers. Union centralisation appears to be a necessary process, because it attempts to confront the centralisation of capitalist power with a corresponding concentration of the negotiating powers of the union. It has the disadvantage, however, that it makes the unions remote from their rank and file, and this threatens their existence, particularly as a machine external to the workshop. In the long run, the unions' strength stems solely from the participation of its members. The absence of the union in the workshop necessarily weakens workers' participation in it.

### THE STRUCTURES AT THE UNIONS' BASE IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD

Even before the end of the war, the Italian unions and employers had agreed, in 1943, to the establishment of *commissione interne*, a form of works councils, which – according to the statute of the newly founded federation of unions – had as their function, 'the protection of the employees and the defence of their collective and individual interests in the workshop as well as the surveillance of the execution of collective bargaining agreements' (Accornero 1974:86). Bargaining policy is explicitly left to the union as a resort outside the workshop.

Already in the first agreement, the works councils were defined not so much as a body of representation for the workers as a link between the workers and the unions. Later, the *commissione interne* developed into formally democratic structures of employee representation in the workshop, elected by all workers. Although the rights of the Italian works councils lagged far behind those which had been granted to their West German counterparts in the course of their development, they were of a similar kind. Thus, in the settlement of January 1946, they were allowed a certain amount of control over lay-offs. And, in practice, during the immediate post-war period the works councils filled the gaps in activity left by the still-non-existent union bargaining.

After 1945 'departmental commissioners' were installed in the large workshops who were in a way the predecessors of the *delegati*. They functioned as a link between the works council and the work force, and were elected by all employees in their department, but were, nevertheless, clearly a union institution. The union did not develop this organisational initiative any further, and the departmental commissioners became a victim of the anti-Communist and anti-union repression of the 1950s. (Here there is also a parallel in the suppression of Communist members of works councils and

unions during the same period in West Germany.) In both countries the unions' workshop collectors (*Betriebskassierer*) were, in a strict sense, the only union functionaries in the workshop during the post-war era. With these officials, the departmental commissioners and the works council members, the CGIL possessed a network of activists in the factories that it could have used to create its own union body on the shop floor. In 1949, the discussion about such a structure did begin. The second congress of the CGIL in Genoa, in October of the same year, agreed to the establishment of a 'committee of union activists' (the collectors) as a '*peripheral* instrument of the union' in order to coordinate and direct union work and 'to put the directives of the local union into practice in the workshop' (*ibid.*: 90).

Nevertheless, there was a dispute over union structures: Lama, later the CGIL general secretary declared, for example, that he would not actively support an institutionalisation of the union within the workshop, because the shop-floor union would necessarily lead to shop-floor contracts, and corporate and shop-floor-centred tendencies would be encouraged. The union was not able to develop the activist committees into shop-floor structures for its rank and file – in part, because the unions did not really desire to do this. At the same time the socialist and communist parties were present in the factories with their shop-floor cells. In the statutes of the CPI it is even stated that: 'The cell on the shop-floor remains the basic form of party organisation' (*ibid.*: 92–3). The shop-floor structures for the representation of workers' interests in the BRD carry on a tradition that goes back to the last century (Saurien 1974). Under their statutory constitution the *Betriebsräte* have been forced into a dual role that institutionally alienated them from the unions and partially brought them into conflict with the interests of the employees that they were supposed to represent. They had the duty of 'attending to the common economic interests of the employees in relation to the employer', but also that of 'supporting the employer in the fulfilment of the workshop's purpose' (*Kollektives Arbeitsrecht*, 1955: 211). Thus, in contrast to the *commissione interne*, the *Betriebsräte* are legal institutions, but, like the *commissione interne*, they are elected by all the employees. Nevertheless, unlike the *commissione interne*, workers who are not union-organised may be elected to the *Betriebsräte* and may even control the majority of the seats in it.

Except for the expansion of co-determination rights and the weakening of the formulation of the works councils' orientation toward the enterprise's purpose, nothing was essentially changed in the situation of this institution by the *Betr. VG* of 1952 as well as by its amendment in 1972. After 1945, the *Betriebsräte* that had spontaneously developed were at first reinstitutionalised by a Control Council Law and later by *Betr. VG* in the individual *Länder*. Their immediate duties were to get production rolling again in the industrialists' absence, later to maintain jobs by fighting the dismantling of means of production; and, finally, although not officially empowered to do so, to negotiate wages in the workshop.

The works councils in the Federal Republic of Germany are clearly not unionist bodies. Nevertheless, they are identified with the union by the work-

forces – this is verified by every sociological study on this subject. One reason for this attitude is above all the fact that in the most important branches of industry union members occupy between 80 and 90 per cent of the works council seats. Additionally, the union-organised members of the councils, especially chairmen, generally play a leading role on the local level of the union hierarchy. The ambivalent position of these persons (on the one hand, a part of the shop organisation, obligated to the well-being of the workshop and to labour peace; on the other hand, a union functionary) has serious effects upon the form of the unions' presence on the shop floor and upon their bargaining policy.

Unlike in Italy, there has always been a union delegate on the shop floor in Germany, although one could not have spoken at all times of a secure base for the union in the workshop in the sense of its active intervention in shop-floor labour relations. Even before the Bismarckian Anti-Socialist Law which, in 1878, prohibited the legal existence of workers' organisations, the unions had *Vertrauensleute* in many work-shops. Following the annulment of the Anti-Socialist Law, these stewards were the re-founders of the unions. Since this time they have belonged to the driving force behind the German union movement, though they have never possessed any particular rights in the union statutes. They were and are partially considered to be the substructure of the works councils, as a resort for mediation between them and the work-force – similar to the departmental commissioner in Italy.

The *Vertrauensleute* are a purely union institution without any legal foundation or limitations. The workers rate their role highly. They see him as a colleague who has direct contact with them, performs the same work as they do, and is not alienated from them through work-leaves (*freigestellt*) or by working in a distant office as the *Betriebsräte* often are.

After World War II, union shop stewards developed simultaneously with the works councils in some workshops in Germany; this means that above all the stewards from the period of the Weimar Republic resumed their duties. However, the movement was neither immediately nor officially and extensively supported by the unions. In those workshops where a works councillor or a local union official became engaged in the organisation of a shop steward committee (*Vertrauensleutekörper*), the stewards soon gained in vitality and importance. The defeat of the unions' efforts for a socio-political reformation of West Germany led to an organised revival of the movement, particularly in IG Metall. The immediate occasion for the reinforcement of their work was the passage of the *Betr. VG* of 1952.

The unions had hoped that the new law would strengthen their role in the work-shop, though the passage of the Co-Determination Law for Iron- and Steel-Manufacturing and Mining in 1951, as well as the political situation had already greatly reduced their hopes. After the new law on organisation in the work shop had taken effect, the unions feared, not incorrectly, that the legal limitation of the role, duties and rights of the *Betriebsräte* would alienate them from the unions.

At the second congress of IG Metall as well as at the second federal congress

of the DGB, lively criticism was expressed of the over-cautious and reserved strategy of the union leadership during the deliberations on the *Betr. VG*. During these disputes in IG Metall and other unions, a new group of leaders developed which based itself on the *Vertrauensleute* movement and promoted it in order to gain ground within the union and to combat the expulsion of the union from the shop floor.

At the same time, the new leadership – supported by the criticism of the shop stewards about the partially unsuccessful bargaining activities of the early fifties – enforced the revival and centralisation of wage policy. Their undeniable successes – for example, the settlements for shorter working hours that were arranged in central bargaining talks (first, in the metal industry the Settlement of Bremen in 1956 reduced the working week from 48 to 45 hours; later the forty-hour week), the lengthening of holidays, holiday pay – strengthened the centralist position within West German wages policy and even made it nearly unassailable for a long time.

## A NOVEL IDEA: SHOP-FLOOR-RELATED BARGAINING POLICY

### THE WEAKNESSES OF A STRONG UNION

Even at the same time that IG Metall, as wage leader attained its successes in wage policy, the inadequacy of central settlements became obvious and was openly expressed for the first time: the absence of union bargaining in the workshop. The qualitative side – namely, the necessary control of working conditions and labour organisation by the workers themselves – was neglected for the time being, but the problem of wages developed into a scandal in this period of rapid economic growth. The difference between wages covered by labour contract and effective earnings increased continually. According to a survey by IG Metall in 1955, the wage gap for male workers (those in piece work excluded) amounted to 22.5 per cent, for female workers to 17.6 per cent. The industrialists used the leeway between what they conceded to the unions in the form of general wage- and salary-scale agreements, and what they were forced to concede to the work-force (under pressure of full employment and also partially from actions on the shop floor), to reinforce power politics on plant level which often aimed directly at pacifying the workers and corrupting the works councils.

Another problem also caused increasing unrest within the union: a wage policy that was still based on traditional methods of wage determination. These methods were increasingly undermined by the industrialists' introduction of new methods for the determination of wages in the mid-fifties, i.e. job evaluation particularly, as well as new systems for the determination of piecework rates. These were almost entirely initiatives undertaken by the employers for which the unions did not immediately enforce any contract agreements; at the most, the works councils participated in the enforcement of

the new methods; the work-force was generally given a bonus when the new wages were introduced. The unions were kept out of the shop floor on this subject as on others.

Thus, the fear spread among the unions' rank and file that all collective bargaining would be centralised. Fritz Salm, the member of the executive of IG Metall responsible for wages policy, was one of the first to respond to these fears and developed a new concept: shop-floor-related bargaining policy. He admitted that the gap between 'the contractual provision and the shop-floor situation' was often quite large (Salm 1958). He then elucidated his demand for a shop-floor-related bargaining policy which was adopted for the first time by IG Metall at its congress in Nuremberg in 1958 as a guideline for its future policy. However this had virtually no practical results.

The consequences of the old contractual techniques were raised by Salm a year later: in the large workshops, it was impossible to determine wages on the basis of a regional labour contract, and the possibility of shop-floor-related contracts must be considered (Salm 1959:19).

The discussion was continued until 1961; by then it more strongly included working conditions in the concept of the new contract policy and delineated 'shop-floor-related bargaining policy' from 'shop-floor bargaining policy'. Wage policy could not be a shop-floor policy in a strict sense, since it could not be oriented toward the individual workshop but had to be dependent on larger economic areas (Salm 1961). Salm was concerned with the 'conscious exploitation of the particular economic and technical relations in each individual workshop for the improvement of wage and working conditions as well as the inclusion of as many work-shop officials of the unions as possible in the formation of the labour contract. . . .'

The formal solution is then clear: on the one hand, the development of policies concerning general and wage-hierarchy contracts; on the other hand, the creation of supplemental collective agreements for the regional contract, eventually even the settlement of shop-floor contracts. Workshops of a similar nature should be united in one labour contract; in particular, company agreements should be sought. The point reached in the discussion is reflected in the resolutions made by all succeeding congresses of IG Metall, and also by a few other unions, though these resolutions have not brought shop-floor-related bargaining policy one step closer to realisation.

In the mid-sixties this discussion became increasingly exclusively the domain of the unions' left wing and was the main basis for their criticism of union activity. One of their most important representatives, Werner Vitt, the associate chairman of IG-Chemie-Papier-Keramik, included, besides contractual security for effective wages, the following issues in his list of demands for shop-floor-related bargaining policy: (1) the problems of the regulation of labour, (2) special wage and piecework systems, (3) premiums and gratifications, (4) special methods of rationalisation in corporations and workshops, (5) co-determination in and control of vocational training and retraining and educational improvement, etc., (6) co-determination in the creation of funds and social plans in the workshop (Witt 1970). Shop-floor-

related bargaining policy includes the comprehensive regulation of the shop-floor wage and working situations. 'Shop-floor and regional bargaining activities should be combined into one unit. . . . Shop-floor-related bargaining policy should exclude the extremes of a centralised or an exclusively shopfloor wage policy' (Express-International 1972:23).

#### CGIL AND CISL: UNION BETWEEN THE WORKING CLASS AND THE WORKSHOP

In Italy, the trend in bargaining policy toward the workshop has been impelled – among other things – by the rivalry between the two large union federations. The small, Social Democratic – Republican UIL has played hardly any part in this process, since it adheres to the traditional concept of unionism. The policy of the Christian-Democratic CISL (founded in 1950, following its break away from the CGIL) has been oriented on the workshop since its establishment. The CISL combined Christian-Social concepts of the union with Anglo-Saxon influences: the position of the worker on the shop floor was to be improved by regulations similar to co-determination; or the CISL wage policy remained from the very beginning immanent to the system and was oriented towards the rate of productivity improvement. However, all this was not to be determined on the national but rather on the work-shop level. The CISL was based on American models in these matters as well as on the subject of greater autonomy for the industrial unions in relation to the central association. The union's policy led to a reformist ideology of participation, but it did call for a true foundation of the union within the workshop.

The CGIL traditionally favoured the horizontal structures of the union as an expression of the general interests of the working class. It justified its original rejection of a shop-floor-related policy by reference to the class character of the union which should not be superseded by corporate and workshop-centred tendencies. The CISL upheld the associative concept of the union, i.e., the union is only the organisation of its members, while the CGIL claimed to speak for all the members of the working-class as a 'class' union.

The CGIL was forced to reappraise its centralist policy when its metal workers' union FIOM-CGIL lost the majority of the seats in the works council at Fiat for the first time, in the election of 1955. Suddenly, the shop-floor dimension of bargaining policy became open to discussion. In 1956, the Fourth Congress of the CGIL debated about whether the to-be-established union workshop sections (see page 141) should be granted the power to negotiate collective agreements or not. At the same time the problem of workshop wage policy being executed by the works councils was continually raised. Hardly a year before Salm intervened, Novella the FIOM general secretary, formulated the demand that, especially in the large workshop, every specific aspect of labour relations on the shop floor must be the object of union bargaining. The collective bargaining should integrate these nego-

tiations instead of leaving them to the discretion of the employers. Nevertheless, the union must not entrust this task to the works councils alone, but must also be present at the work-shop negotiations (Accornero 1974:113).

In Italy, just as in the BRD, the concept of shop-floor-related bargaining policy foresaw an interplay of central and shop-floor strategies. Also in Italy, the unions' left wing took up most strongly the demand for the relation of bargaining policy to the situation in the workshop. For example, with nearly the same words as the West German supporters of shop-floor-related bargaining policy, Vittorio Foa has explained that it does not suffice to negotiate wages alone, if the amount of work which is supposed to correspond to the wages is left to the disposition of the employer. The transition from pure wage policy to demands concerning the relationship of wage and labour (e.g. the pace of work, the number of employees, working hours) includes as its logical consequence the demand for the control of the shop-floor organisation of labour and production. Sergio Garavini for his part postulated that actions for shorter working hours must be combined with the control of the pace of work. He formulated demands for the control of production similar to those that were enforced fifteen years later for the first time by Fiat workers (Sclavi, G. 1968:33).

The opponents of shop-floor-related bargaining policy also argue along the same lines in both countries. The accusation in Italy that this policy encourages corporate and workshop-centred tendencies, corresponds to that of syndicalism or workshop-syndicalism in Germany. The development of the new contract strategies in each country has apparently taken place independently of the development in the other country, but both demonstrate North American influence, especially by the bargaining policy of the United Auto Workers Union under Walter Reuther. The actual difference between the two strategies lies in the fact that in Germany, the unions have not gone beyond a few abortive attempts to put the new concept into practice, while in Italy, its practical realisation has succeeded, no matter how hesitantly, in a process which was fraught with many difficulties and which was in no way uninterrupted. It should be further noted that in Italy the preconditions for shop-floor bargaining, which had to a degree already existed for some time in Germany, had to be created in the course of a difficult development. One of these preconditions was to break away from the extremely centralised structure, above all to establish greater autonomy for the industrial unions, to shift power to the vertical structure; another was to establish a base for the union within the workshop.

In both countries periodical rounds of bargaining over wages first had to be enforced through labour struggles. In Italy, the various industrial unions did not manage to renew the much older national agreements until the mid-fifties, and then they were signed by the union federation for its constituents. At the end of the sixties, bargaining autonomy was transferred to the individual unions (in Germany it had rested with the industrial unions from the very beginning). But in Italy the movement for decentralisation did not stop at this level; instead, in 1962, it reached the workshop. Quantitatively,

1960 marks the turning-point; workshop bargaining was essentially limited to the determination of production premiums, but the responsibility for these negotiations shifted from the works councils to the union itself.

Other than this, the theoretical disintegration of centralism that had been developing since 1953 was only reflected to a limited degree in the practical execution of wage policy as late as 1962/63. Then, in these years, the metal workers' unions made the principle of the 'articulation' of collective bargaining the subject of a bargaining round. In addition to the traditional demands for higher wages and shorter hours, the demand for union rights in the workshops and in collective bargaining was established. In practice, the unions were concerned with the expansion of their influence on the shop floor.

For the period between 1945 and 1968, the bargaining round of the metal workers in 1962/63 was the hardest and longest struggle. Initially in the negotiations with the state employer's association (Intersind) and later in those with the private employers, an agreement concerning union rights was pushed through. This contract represents an 'historic turning-point' (*svolta storica*) in postwar collective bargaining. Besides considerable wage increases, and a cut in weekly working time by two hours, the unions gained certain possibilities for negotiating on the workshop level. In return, the unions had to make concessions in the area of labour relations: the opening clauses for shop-floor bargaining of supplementary agreements were limited by the fixing of the possible contents of bargaining as well as by rigid procedural regulations. But the introduction of a peace obligation clause into the preamble was the most serious concession. Nevertheless, despite all the reservations, a new system of collective bargaining was created, and the work-shop level was opened as negotiating terrain for the unions; although company bargaining had already existed prior to this, negotiations in the workshop now became a general principle. The number of work shop agreements increased enormously.

Although the actual idea behind shop-floor-related bargaining strategy as it had been formulated by Foa, Garavini, Lettieri and others, namely the transition from quantitative to so-called qualitative demands, had not yet been attained, this new agreement did produce the prerequisites for such a development. The employers very correctly recognised the possibilities offered to the unions and also the dangers which the system brought for themselves. Therefore, in the succeeding years they continually tried to contest the unions' right to articulated collective bargaining. The first step towards decentralisation had been taken; a new equilibrium in labour relations was established, but it was not yet stable, as Merli-Brandini notes (1967:79). The left wing of the Italian unions had also pointed out that the shop-floor-related bargaining policy could not lead to the exclusion of any one of the levels of bargaining, that negotiations on the workshop, regional or national level were not alternatives, but rather complementary parts of a strategy as a whole. The workshop level was only emphasised because of the potential for mobilisation which it offers (Sclavi 1968:31, 2).

## THE INTERDEPENDENCY OF UNION STRUCTURES IN THE WORKSHOP AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING: THE NEGATIVE EXAMPLE

### ITALY: UNION WORKSHOP SECTIONS AND ARTICULATED BARGAINING STRATEGY

If the workshop is supposed to be the location of maximum participation by workers in the union, then the unity of bargaining and organisational policy must above all be realised here. On the theoretical level, the Italian unions had also recognised this necessity, but the unity itself was not created until the cycle of labour struggles between 1968 and 1972. The General Council of the CISL had already addressed this problem in 1953 (Ferrario 1962:79). Although the CISL subordinated its union policy to the efficiency of the economy during these years, it did go into a central question of unionist development in Italy. In the face of certain successes of the CISL and under pressures which resulted from the working class's impotence against the repression by the employers, the CGIL (still the union that represented the majority of the working class in spite of several defeats) also faced the problem of its relation to the work shop (CGIL 1955:254). The CISL, in July 1954, and the CGIL, in December of the same year, decided to establish union sections on the shop floor: in the CISL, they are called SAS (Sezione Aziendale Sindacale), in the CGIL SSA (Sezione Sindacale di Azienda). Although at the same time, shop-floor-related bargaining policy was also being theoretically developed, the federations did not arm their workshop sections with suitable negotiating powers. The CGIL called upon its activist committees to reorganise themselves into SSAs and to create a 'leadership body' for themselves; the SSA – according to a decision of a conference in December 1954 – was supposed to take over all duties of the union within the workshop with the exception of activities dealing with collective bargaining; this remained the exclusive right of the regional organisation of the union (Accornero 1974:107).

Although the CISL had propagated the union section on the shop floor earlier than the CGIL, it was even less willing to endow its sections with decision-making powers on collective bargaining. The SAS of the CISL have the job of establishing election lists for the works council and representing the union on the shop floor; they stand under the direct control of the provincial union. Generally, decision-making powers were concentrated at this time in the territorial (horizontal) structures of the union; the workshop organisation was basically the result of a bureaucratic decentralisation (Treu 1971:46).

Under the competitive pressure of the CISL, the CGIL went even further a few years later and began to consider whether it would not be sensible to give the SSA participatory rights in collective bargaining. Cautiously, it was listed that the works councils' leeway for action would have to be reduced. In

practice, the official company collective agreements continued to be settled by the provincial unions.

The UIL did not create its unionist base on the shop floor, NAS (Nucleo Aziendale del Sindacato), until November 1959, and then spoke out against any form of workshop bargaining. As early as at a conference in 1956, the CGIL counted over 2000 union workshop sections. In reality, however, the SSA of the CGIL, the SAS of the CISL and the NAS of the UIL have never been established in many workshops. The employers have never agreed to recognise them; not even the unions themselves have ever supported the sections enough to keep them really alive. The CISL aims only at organisational decentralisation, while the CGIL is inhibited by its fear of corporate and work-shop-centred tendencies (Regalia 1973:8).

The necessity of decentralising the powers for decision-making on collective bargaining results from the needs of the workers in the workshop; however, this necessity is supposed to be fulfilled by a procedure which flows strictly from the upper echelons of the hierarchy to the lower ones and in which the higher levels of decision-making not only precede the lower levels but also provide their legitimacy. Thus, the decentralisation of collective bargaining or rather of its levels has not been accompanied by the decentralisation of negotiating power; this power is transmitted from the federation to the industrial union, and these delegate it to the provincial union, but the authority on contracts remained, just as in Germany, with the executive of the industrial union. Thus the union workshop sections have remained without autonomy or life. As long as the CISL denied any autonomy of decisions to the SAS, it was easy for the CGIL to criticise the organisational policy of the CISL. When the CISL radicalised its stand on bargaining policy, the functions of the SAS were not redefined.

Not until the articulated negotiating strategy was enforced in the early sixties was there a hesitant turn in the discussion. The CISL metal workers' union, the FIM, improved the position of the SAS in 1963, and defined them as the first congressional instance of the industrial union; with this statutory amendment it bound the SAS closely to the union and, in doing so, tried to prevent any corporate tendencies. Then the SSA of the CGIL also received greater autonomy. In the CGIL there was even talk about their becoming the unified bodies through which the division of the Italian union movement could be overcome. Nevertheless, the union workshop sections remained institutions without essential influence. They would have to be understood more as the lowest echelon of the union hierarchy than as the executors of the will of the rank and file.

Such a summary of the discussion could create the impression that in these years the work shop level was no-man's land. This was naturally not the case. In reality, labour relations were administered by the works councils in Italy, just as they were in the Federal Republic. With rather poor results, certainly without handling all aspects of labour relations, the works councils directed shop-floor wage and labour policy. Despite all the criticism, despite all the efforts surrounding the union workshop sections, the works council still

proved to be the most vital institution for the worker in the workshop.

In 1961, the CGIL contested the works councils' right to bargaining. The metal workers' unions demanded the transfer of the power for collective bargaining to the union workshop sections during the bargaining round of 1965/66, but this offensive remained unsuccessful; the recession had greatly weakened the unions' negotiating position. Instead, the bargaining partners created joint technical committees for work safety in the contract agreement. On 18 April, the agreement between the top associations of the bargaining parties concerning the works councils was renewed. According to this agreement their re-election now took place only every two years, which accelerated their decline. Nevertheless, the CGIL adhered to the works council as an institution. Its organisational policy remained ambivalent. Thus, the efforts for an organisational renewal of the union through the union workshop sections proved to be a failure. In the workshops in which they existed, only a small percentage of the union members took part in the life of the sections. In practice, it is only a sort of leadership body that either competes with the works council (and thereby comes up short nearly every time) or runs errands for the works council and hardly differs from it – even in its personnel.

The general development described here is important for understanding the changes in the Italian union movement in the cycle of struggles from 1968 to 1972. Special consideration also need to be given to the particular development of the Catholic movement, above all that of the CISL metal workers' union, FIM (Treu 1971; Cella *et al.* 1972; FIM-CISL 1972). A radical revision of its conception of shop-floor union organisation began in 1966/67 with the reconsideration of the collective bargaining activities of 1962/63 and 1965; the articulated bargaining strategy was altered. The national collective agreement was no longer supposed to handle exhaustively all the items of bargaining, as this procedure had necessarily limited the powers of the lower echelons. In particular the peace obligation was recognised as dangerous and sharply criticised. The function of the works council in collective bargaining was theoretically overcome; each level of collective bargaining could have various autonomous functions and, therefore, must possess suitable powers. The shop-floor level must become the dynamic centre for the new system, and not only because the organisation of labour and the workers' situation can only be attacked at all on this level, but also because capitalist power is founded in the workshop and an opposing strategy must be developed to confront it. The pyramid of collective bargaining should be inverted; this was also valid for the form of organisation within the union. This should be the primary union body from which all others receive their legitimacy, and from which the preparation of general bargaining strategy and union policy must originate (Treu 1971:85).

Additionally, FIM propagated the opening of the union's shop sections to other unions and closely approached the efforts toward unity of the CGIL. Thus, the two large metal-workers' unions came increasingly closer to one another. Both now wanted to make the union shop sections into a collective

bargaining body; the model for its organisation seemed fully developed and the preconditions for its concrete enforcement as a union body on the shop floor seemed to exist.

## FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY: COLLECTIVE BARGAINING WITHOUT SHOP STEWARDS

In the Federal Republic these problems confronted the unions just as in Italy, and forced a discussion about the necessity of a bargaining strategy related to the shop-floor situation, but in practice nothing was changed in the centralised structure. Wage drift created the leeway for a shop-floor wage policy which was used by the employers and works councils and kept the unions in the major field of its activities outside the workshop. One should note that the *Betriebsräte* are more strongly institutionally secured in Germany and, due to their legal foundation, are more alienated from the unions than are the *commissione interne* in Italy. At the same time the works councillors have a strong influence on the policy of the union due to their position as honorary members in the leadership committee in all echelons of the union hierarchy.

Although the *Betr. VG* explicitly excludes wage policy from the contents of shopfloor agreements (the domain of the works councils) unless the collective agreements do not provide for the settlement of supplementary shop-floor agreements (cf. §77 para. 3, Works Council Law of 19 January 1972), a study by the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt has shown 'that works councils exercise immediate influence on the size of wages in questions concerning the method of their determination as well as directly in wage negotiations'. The works councillors who were interviewed reacted positively to the demand for the contractual guarantee of wage components and social benefits at present not covered by agreements, but they argued that 'simple contract coverage for effective earnings . . . [would] lead to the abandonment of possibilities for shop-floor wage policy and make the works council's leeway for action on wage policy even narrower' (Mosler and Teschner 1973:163, 166).

Particularly in the period of economic boom – as was the case in the Federal Republic until 1966/67 – the West German industrialists protected themselves against any unrest caused by wage problems by means of non-contractual wage components (Schmidt, E. 1973: 186). So long as the unions' successes in collective bargaining and those of the works councils in their wage policy tend to counterbalance each other on the basis of general economic development, the need for legitimacy in the eyes of both members and workforce is fulfilled; the latent potential for conflict which results from the strained relationship between unions and works councils will not become reality. The interpenetration of unions and works councils by the same persons helps to keep the relationship peaceful. It generally causes a reciprocal neutralisation and strengthens the tendencies within the German union movement to keep the industrial peace.

The attempt to put a check on the workshop wage policy of the works councils or even to replace it with shop-floor-related collective bargaining, was bound to meet with energetic resistance on the part of many works councillors and thus of honorary and even full-time union functionaries. That is an important reason why, despite certain preconditions (the contract autonomy of the industrial unions, the existence of a union organ within the workshop) a dynamic of decentralisation in collective bargaining could not be developed.

Thus, the first serious attempt by IG Metall, in the early sixties, to put shop-floor-related collective bargaining into practice ended in a fiasco. The Ford works in Cologne were a thoroughly suitable field for experimentation. They were not bound in matters of collective bargaining by membership in the employers' association; in organisational policy the works were underdeveloped (the degree of unionisation was only 4.6 per cent) and there was a favourable situation for initiating workshop policy, since the work-force was very dissatisfied with working conditions and shop-floor power relations. IG Metall supported the opposition in the works council which asserted itself in the next election, and also initiated a campaign for organisation together with these new workshop officials. The union further demanded from Ford the settlement of a company agreement. The established demands anticipated many contents of the struggles in Italy in the period 1968 to 1972. They included demands for control of production as well as the control by the works council of job allocation on the assembly-line, the assignment of personnel to the lines, the rate and pace of the line, the employment of relief men and the sequence of jobs. The workers and salaried employees at Ford reacted positively to the offensive and membership rose to 20 per cent of the work force. IG Metall prepared activities to enforce its demands; the company management countered these by joining the employers' association; in this manner the labour contract that according to prevailing legal jurisdiction was valid for North Rhine Westphalia, became applicable to Ford, and IG Metall became subject to the peace obligation. With this, the resistance that existed in the union against shop-floor-related collective bargaining received legal support, since the planned activities could not be executed. For many years this defeat weakened the position of those who had actively supported a decentralisation of contract policy in Germany.

Shop-floor-related bargaining policy remained a focal point of discussion within the unions. The main subject of these debates was the same as in Italy. Nearly all advocates of shop-floor-related strategy conceived of this form of policy as a means of gaining a stronger foothold for the union in the workshop. The fortification of the *Vertrauensleute* on the shop floor and their participation in collective bargaining was supposed to be the prerequisite as well as the result of shop-floor-related bargaining activity. These demands, which were later raised only by the opposition within the union, were established at the end of the fifties by members of the executive of IG Metall.

Thus, Fritz Strothmann (1959), who was responsible for works councils and shop stewards, criticised the fact that the unions 'often stop . . . before the

gates of the industrial shops'. For this reason, he wanted to gain a stronger foothold for the shop stewards as a union body in the workshops as well as in the organisation itself. Fritz Salm (1961) attacked the remoteness of the collective bargaining commissions from the rank and file in the large bargaining districts 'such as, for example, North Rhine Westphalia, in which labour contracts are negotiated which cover nearly a million employees'. The counterpart to the Italian discussion of the workshop sections and their negotiating powers is the demand in the Federal Republic for the strengthening of the shop stewards committees in the unions as well as in the workshops, for decision-making powers in bargaining policy or *Vertrauensleute* and for the creation of shop-floor bargaining commissions. Thus, in the years between 1958 and 1969, the discussion of decentralisation in labour contract and organisational policy was urged on, but it remained without practical results. Shop-floor-related collective bargaining has not been realised. The *Vertrauensleute* are limited to the position of a go-between for the work-force and works council, for members and the union. In the statutes of the unions they are only marginally mentioned without any precise definition of their position and duties, which strangely reminds one of the activist committees of the CGIL which were also only allowed to be a 'peripheral instrument'.

It appears almost as an omen of the disputes during and following the September strikes of 1969, that IG Metall enforced a demand in a central agreement, directly before the strikes, that the *Vertrauensleute* could not be penalised for their activity on the shop floor; however, their names had to be reported in writing to the company. Thus, although the organisational presence of the union in the workshop was recognised for the first time, the *Vertrauensleute* did not receive real duties in the most important area of the union: collective bargaining.

## THE POSITIVE EXAMPLE: THE *DELEGATI* MOVEMENT

### THE CREATION OF THE *DELEGATI*

The change in the unions in Italy which went as far as opening them to the 'struggle against the wage system' in the cycle of labour struggles, 1968–72, in which the union defined itself as an instrument of the class struggle, carried on the dynamic of decentralisation;<sup>1</sup> however, the union could do this only by making a radical break with certain traditions. Disruption and continuity also belong to the conditions for the emergence of the *delegati*.

In the years directly following the 'Hot Autumn' of 1969, union literature was dominated by the attempt to theorise about a fully autonomous origin for the *delegati*, in which anti-unionist and communist tendencies were combined. Today, however, the attempt is often made to construct a continuity for the development of union structures on the shop floor from the activist committees, through the workshop sections, to the *delegati* (Antoniazzi 1975:8). Segments of the unions refuse to accept the breach between the

tradition of union structures for the rank and file in Italy and the factory councils into their basically apologetic attitude toward their own organisation. Nevertheless, this breach cannot be denied any more than the fact that the discussions over workshop sections, over gaining a foothold for the union in the workshop and over shop-floor-related bargaining strategy have prepared the way for the *delegati* movement; also the fact that several origins and predecessors for the *delegati* can be identified, can hardly be denied. This certainly does not mean that they did not develop spontaneously; certainly there is no 'creation out of nothingness', but the term 'spontaneity of the working class' (as Rosa Luxemburg defined it in *Mass Strike, Party and the Unions*) does not intend this. The *delegati* themselves assess their development as follows:

We jumped on to the tables in the dining room and organised assemblies and the first strikes. In these strikes, we discovered the organisational instrument which then became the *delegato*; their election was direct, the most militant colleagues were nominated.<sup>2</sup>

Like this *delegato*, his colleagues in the Fiat works defined the *delegato* as a child and an instrument of struggle. The statements of *delegati* from the Pirelli works are particularly interesting, because here the struggle had already begun in 1968, with an exemplary strike on the issue of work-effort (Pietropado 1970; *Quindici* 1969; Sclavi, M. 1974), and also the creation of new structures for the representation of the rank and file. This was an opposition in part within the union which had developed in the CGIL on the shop floor (CGIL *delegati* and officials are still proud of this fact), and in part among workers who were influenced by extra-parliamentary groups; they worked together in a *Comitato Unitario di Base*. The first CUB urged the struggle on, organised it, encouraged the unity of the workers in the struggle and contributed greatly to the rise of a representative structure on the departmental level.

One can speak only of an original process of development for the *delegati* in those big workshops in which the new structures were developed at first; in such shops there is no doubt: the *delegati* were initially strike committees, organs which the workers created for themselves or which asserted themselves among the workers in order to organise and direct labour struggles. It is actually nothing new in the history of the labour movement that always when, on the most important level of conflict, appropriate union (or political) bodies do not exist, the workers create their own committees to lead the fight. And that in Italy, in 1968/69 the union was not sufficiently present on the shop floor to take over this task, is denied seriously neither by unionists nor by social scientists. In which direction these strike committees might develop, whether they would become a political council movement with the aim of the takeover of power in state and society, whether they would remain ephemeral organs for the leadership of one labour conflict, a mass movement, or whether they would be adopted as a more or less lasting structure into the unions – all these alternatives depended upon the historical politico-economic context.

How much the Italian *delegati* movement was connected to the tradition of such strike committees is demonstrated by the history of its rise in the individual workshops:

The process of developing the delegates began as early as 1962 when we all . . . came to understand . . . after 25 days of strike . . . – because we were united – that we had to find a new way to organise ourselves on the shop floor. At the time, we created an agitation committee, that is with one representative per department. A name was suggested to the assembly and it approved. This committee had to develop demands, maintain contacts with the outside and also decide on the forms of conflict. (D'Agostini 1974:210).

The strike committee later served as the basis for the new structure of *delegati*. Naturally, there are very few shops with a tradition of strike committees that dates back to the period before 1968, because such committees as a rule take over the leadership of a conflict and dissolve themselves once again with the end of the activity. Most of them did not develop before 1968/69, – and then often only under pressure from a CUB, which forced the union to establish the shop-floor movement. An example of this is the struggle of the Candy workers in Autumn 1968 (Regini 1974:23ff.).

In this way, in a number of Italian workshops – at Fiat, Pirelli, Marzotto and some others – strike committees were established and articulated according to department, shop or work group. These committees represent the actual origins of the *delegati* movement; they are occasionally called *delegati di lotta* (conflict delegates) by Italian sociologists. They were elected by all the workers in a department or in an entire factory, whereas the form of the election had not yet been regulated by any formal procedure. They were rarely controlled by the union, they were primarily organisers of the mobilisation and actions of the workers.

The duties of these *delegati* were reflected in the title given the strike committee: agitation committee, basis committee, and, above all, conflict committee. The *delegati* replaced the old, decrepit shop-floor structures of representation that were incapable of renewal or of taking over the leadership of a spontaneous movement. In the workshops that formed the vanguard of the conflicts in the 'Hot Autumn', the workers themselves came to the conclusion that the conflict that they would carry out would have to be strengthened by a more precisely articulated structure of representation on the shop floor.

Undoubtedly, other origins for the movement than the strike committees also exist; in this sense, the experts on piecework and on work on the assembly-line should be mentioned. They had, however, rather technical functions and were in part designated by the union, in part elected. These experts were supposed to control the pace of work and had only limited power. They were essentially a branch of the joint commissions on job classification and piecework, similar to those which also exist in various collective bargaining

districts in Germany. The initiative of the provincial union was decisive in the establishment of such experts or piecework commissions; they were not the creation of the spontaneous mass movement. The already limited powers of the experts were minutely regulated by agreements with management. It was their task to control the administration of collective agreements on piecework and on work on the assembly-line; they were only rarely concerned with concrete working conditions. The union demanded the institutionalisation of such experts in 1968, partly because it had to accept the failure of the workshop sections in view of the impending conflicts.

The actual *delegati* movement was influenced by the example of the assembly-line experts in the sense of sociological imagination; in particular the criticism of the limited, technical function of the experts has led to a precise concept of the workers concerning the duties of the conflict delegates. Another source of the movement is found in the various basis and unity committees that were created in many workshops in 1968. Some of these were basis committees outside the union that had a great deal of influence on the shop-floor union and were in part identical to it in their personnel, but basically they must be ascribed more to the political arena. In these committees the influence of political groups from outside the workshop is occasionally strong; the left-wing socialist party, PSIUP, played an important role in some CUBs. The PSIUP organisation in Turin in particular had studied the factory council movement of 1920 and adhered to this model in its activities. Unlike the extra-parliamentary groups, the PSIUP had its base in the union, since, as a splinter group from the Socialist Party and just like this party, it possessed a current (*corrente*) within the CGIL.

At several conferences in 1968, the left-wing socialists as well as the communist left proposed the establishment of *delegati* in the sense of a council movement. This later helped the official unions to create a sense of continuity between discussion in the union before 1968 and the *delegati* movement. At a conference of FIOM-CGIL in Bologna in 1968 it was suggested that *delegati* be elected by the active groups of members in the department; however, another suggestion prevailed instead, i.e. the formation of union unity committees. Such committees, which are supposed to establish unity among the members of the various affiliated unions, were founded in many factories. It is not always easy to differentiate between them and the CUB since both aimed at overcoming the union schism on the shop floor; the opposition within the union was often represented in both, and both tried to be present in all departments. Non-union colleagues also participated in the union unity committees; they included activists who were attracted by the novelty of the conflicts and demands and dissidents who were bound to groups outside the workshop. The basis and unity committees promoted the development of strong militancy and of a deep loyalty toward the rank and file on the shop floor and essentially aided in spreading new forms of struggle and new contents for struggle from a few pilot workshops to the entire Italian industry (Regalia 1973:28ff).

In 1968, a basic change began to take place in the life of the union: no

longer was the works council or workshop section the most important body in the workshop, but instead the assembly of all employees. All important decisions on bargaining strategy in the strikes were now made by the workshop assemblies. These were able to mobilise a percentage of workers that by far exceeded every experience of previous years: the average lay around 50 per cent. This naturally altered the traditional form in which unionist struggles in the workshop are executed. However, one must be careful not to overrate the factors from outside the unions. Treu has found in his study of 34 workshops only four in which the continual, organised participation of such committees in the assemblies can be verified (Treu 1971: 129).

## THE DECENTRALISATION OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

In the contract activity of 1969, the principle of shop-floor-related bargaining (*contrattazione articolata*) was defended against the attacks of the employers, and every limitation on its articulation was abolished. In spring 1970, decentralisation was enforced down to the departmental level.

Decisive for this development was the offensive against the capitalist organisation of labour; however, this activity apparently did not stand in any direct, temporal relationship to the concrete changes which were undertaken at the beginning of the sixties and earlier. This period was characterised by the massive employment of payment by results system and other means of increasing productivity. The high level of productivity in Italy was not only achieved by the rapid development of machinery and the introduction of new technology, but also by a greater degree of exploitation which was reflected in the very high pace of work and the long working hours. Large industrial investments took place against an unvarying level of employment. The employment level of 1963 was not regained until 1969; at the same time, production had increased enormously; the real national income grew by nearly 7 per cent annually between 1959 and 1968 (Albers 1974: 120).

Thus, general technological development did not directly produce the crisis of the capitalist organisation of labour. Instead, what led to it was the resistance of the workers to the deterioration of working conditions. This resistance is related to the concrete forms of labour expenditure in the production process. If the *delegato* is described as a result of the struggles, this implies more than the mere necessity of a strike committee to organise; a struggle for a general proportional or even an egalitarian wage increase can very well be led by a strike committee that does not possess a network within the individual departments of the work shop; the approval by the majority of the employees on the shop floor is sufficient support. Not until the content of the struggles of 'Hot Autumn' of 1969 and those of the following years – namely, control of the organisation of labour and of working conditions – did the articulation of a shop-floor strike committee become necessary. The control of piecework rates and of job classification at each

work-place is only possible with a network of multipliers which is present in every department (Castellina 1970).

The fight against the rapid pace of work and the short piecework rates is dependent upon the articulation of the shop-floor organisation of the unions. This also means, however, that the politicisation of collective bargaining must be related to the development of new organisational structures. (This may include the expansion of the list of demands to those for control and is a form of politicisation, since it attacks the industrialists in the true sphere of their domination, the expenditure of already purchased labour power, and contests the lack of control over this expenditure.)

A relationship also exists between the new forms of struggle and the *delegati* movement. While the control function of the foreman is shifted in individual piecework to the worker and internalised by him, in group piecework the worker is additionally controlled by his colleagues. The conversion of these functions of piecework for increasing productivity into a collective act of resistance is represented by the go-slow – an activity which is particularly important in those countries in which there are no strike funds, and in those workshops in which a high basic wage is guaranteed despite the role of work-effort in determining wages. The go-slow at Pirelli (see page 147) which was copied after 1968 in countless Italian workshops as a new form of action, is a good example. If the slow-down strike is not to be limited to a small group, it requires the precise organisation of the decrease in work-effort shop by shop, department by department. The workers must prove themselves to be the true masters of the machines of production, and build an organisation in opposition to management, and this naturally requires the articulation of the representation of collective interests (as an equivalent to the workshop hierarchy) in every department. Organisational decentralisation becomes a necessity in these struggles.

Many of the new forms of conflict, for example, *il salto della scocca* (the omission of certain tasks during work on the assembly-line), chessboard strikes, confetti strikes, are practicable only if a co-ordinating committee exists in the individual departments. In many cases, such a committee forms the predecessor of a *delegato* structure (Pizzorno 1974:113 ff.), which then allows an even more masterly implementation of the new strike activities.

New forms and contents of struggle and the new organisational structures are closely related to one another. The decentralised bargaining policy on the levels of the department, the assembly-line and the shop, is particularly concerned with the organisation of labour, with working conditions and with job environment. In the face of the reality of the shop floor at these levels, however, even the most progressive company agreement, just like the best national collective agreement, would remain a dead letter, if it were not for the active presence of the *delegati* as representatives of the work group, and if their presence did not allow for the directly effective, precise control of the situation. One delegate at Fiat stated the political consequences (Censi *et al* 1973:152):

But, if you want to reject a certain type of social system, then this is not possible with organisational structures like the works councils which do not have any direct contact with all of the workers. Thus, if you want to move in this direction, you must necessarily create a different type of organization for yourself which can only take the form of the delegate movement and of the factory council.

In spite of all the false alarms concerning the danger of workshop-centred and corporate tendencies which would supposedly result from the decentralisation of collective bargaining, decentralisation – which after all never aimed at the exclusion of the national level – was accompanied by a trend toward egalitarian demands. These aim particularly at the unification of the workers, and thus stand diametrically opposed to such corporate tendencies. The FIM has developed its own egalitarian concept and has supported egalitarian demands of all types. Such demands include those for lump-sum increases, for the higher classification of lower groups (in one case, in Porto Marghera, demands for inverted proportional wage increases were even established), and for a unified system of wage and salary groups for blue- and white-collar workers. Herrmann (1976:321 ff) has correctly pointed out that the new *delegati* structure as a form of abolishing the unequal distribution of decision-making power and potentials for participation which existed in the traditional organisational structure of the union, acts upon the basis of egalitarian demands, and that, thus, the decentralisation of organisational policy contains a new, 'more equal' distribution of power which not only makes greater participation of the members in the union possible, but also reflects this drive for 'equality' in union demands. The growth of supplementary work-shop agreements can be illustrated statistically: in 1967, around 1300; in 1968: 3870; in 1969: close on 2500. 'The total number of workshop agreements rose in 1970 to 4337, in 1971 to the record figure of 6000 and included for the first time a large part of the small and middle-sized workshops in all the important branches of industry' (Censi 1973:277).

Several studies have shown that these agreements are generally signed by a heterogeneous body of union representatives: sometimes, factory councillors and provincial bodies of the industrial unions co-operate; at other times, the union bodies from outside the workshop are present only in name.

## COUNCIL MOVEMENT OR UNION BODY?

To the question of what the delegates are, the research report of Censi *et al.* (1973:277) offers two complementary replies:

1. The *delegati* are the shop stewards (*fiduciari*); they are chosen by a system of direct elections. They are a direct representation of the workers' interests.
2. The *delegati* are the physical manifestation . . . of the 'creativity' of class consciousness, which, in certain historical periods seeks the instruments with which it expresses its political function.

This definition refers to the ambiguity of the *delegati* movement. Immediately after the formation of the first factory councils, it seemed as though the *delegati* possessed the potential of becoming a political council movement. However, although the PSIUP in Turin and other groups still promoted this perspective, the tendency prevailed of recognising and accepting the *delegati* as a structure of the union rank and file. In the view of the political council movement, the immediately political potential of the *delegati* was emphasised: in reality, the decisive blow to this view had fallen long before this, since the mass movement itself did not advance along the political level (in the traditional sense of the term), and this later caused the unionist character of the struggles like that of the *delegati* movement to appear stronger than it actually had been. The strike committees of the mass movements always took the character of councils; they generally adhered to the principles of direct democracy and conformed with this attitude to the requirements of a mass movement. But council structures alone still do not constitute a political council movement.

The 'Hot Autumn' of 1969 was – judging from the issues concerned – primarily a union struggle: it was concerned with the conservation of labour, job security, the highest possible equivalent for labour power. These interests take form in the struggle against excesses in the expenditure of labour power within the production process, in the struggle for higher wages, and in the struggle in defence of jobs (against factory closures, for investment in Southern Italy). Only the rigours of conflict could make the incompatibility of the interests of the workers with those of capital visible. Due to this, and to the overlapping of demands on to the political plane, the struggle was politicised, and also some parallels to the council movement of the past were created. But, while the older movements also established 'mere union' demands, they were also characterised by immediately political demands – as, for example, those for peace in 1917 and 1918 – which did not play any part in the *delegati* movement.

In the theoretical speculations concerning the *delegati* movement as a political workers' movement as disengaged from its union origins, the dual character of the union was under-rated. Until 1968, the union movement actually appeared to be merely the executor of the 'struggle within the wage system' so that one would not have ascribed to it the political dimensions which appeared in the labour struggles of 1969. The anti-capitalist potential of the unions has become acute only in the course of the changes in the unions in France and Italy since 1968. If the *delegati*, despite their political importance, were an organ of the unionist struggle, the question then arises as to the relationship between them and the union. The unions refused to enable the *delegati* to develop their political potential by *integrating them* with the union structure. Garavini criticised this because it was at best a refusal to go beyond unity of action in the process of the unification (Zoll 1975: 283 ff). This was to prove to be the exact situation. Second, the refusal aims at preventing the centralist character of the union's organisation; this centralist and authoritarian character is in a crisis in every West European country (Garavini, 1971).

The union's left wing managed to assert itself on the immediate issue – the adoption of the *delegati* as a structure of the union's rank and file. The organisational revival of the entire union, which was to begin in the workshop, is however still to be realised. The decision in favour of the delegate movement was certainly not an easy one for the unions: on the one hand, there was the possibility of solving the problem of the union presence in the workshop, a problem which had occupied them for ten years without results; on the other hand, there was uncertainty whether the union could control the proposed solution.

There can be no doubt, however, that the *delegati* had an autonomous origin as conflict and strike committees only in the large and middle-sized workshops. Their rapid expansion otherwise was a result of the decisions and efforts of a few industrial unions. One should also note that the need for a new structure for the union's rank and file on the shop floor was evident in many factories. The general secretary of FIOM, Bruno Trentin, maintains that the survival of the *delegati* movement depended on the unions' recognition of the new structures as their own and the dissolution of the old workshop structures. The life of the factory councils outside the unions would only have been very short (Trentin 1974). Trentin's position is corrected and supplemented by the criticism with which the research group of the CISL was confronted in the factories of Northern Italy: the unions have supposedly been forced to recognise the new structures as those of its rank and file, because they would otherwise have lost the remains of their influence and credibility in the workshop (Censi 1973:77 ff).

With the delegate structure, the union liberated itself from the abstract class relationship which the CGIL has propagated following World War II. The better the will of the rank and file asserts itself, thanks to the organisational principles of direct democracy, the faster the union will become what it actually should be, an instrument of the workers which these really possess, and the less the union will be what it has always tended to be, a machine which acts instead of and for the workers. Throwing open the unions to the rank and file certainly does not automatically guarantee the receptiveness of the union to anti-capitalist actions, but it does facilitate this, particularly when this receptivity develops within the framework of a mass movement, of the 'real movement' as Marx called it – and one cannot easily imagine this development otherwise.

The organisational form of the *delegati* reflects the organisation of capitalist production; it uses this organisation in order better to organise the struggle against exploitation. This structure of the movement is simultaneously a necessity as well as a chance. If the workers want to represent a social power, they must build their organisation upon the real foundation of the society in which they act. They fulfill their function as wage workers in the workshop and that is also the area where they can most sensitively strike a blow against capitalist production – and society. Therefore, the idea of turning the potential of organisation of capitalistic production against capital becomes apparent in the *delegati* movement.

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE *DELEGATO*/ *VERTRAUENSMANN* AND THE WORK GROUP<sup>3</sup>

The *delegato* as a factor of the unity of the working class in the concrete (and limited) form of the work group, realises the unity necessary for collective bargaining within the framework of labour relations that concern the homogeneous work group; for the individual member of the work group the *delegato* has a socialising, for the work group a homogenising, function. The factory council as the assembly of all delegates from the workshop takes over these duties in the framework of the labour relations of the entire work force. This union function integrates the *delegato* into the union organisation and thereby also secures his survival as a part of a council structure (not of a council movement) in non-revolutionary periods. The new structure of the union in the workshop has brought about a radical break with traditional bargaining policy, since the administration of labour relations previously was the privilege of the union machine outside the workshop or – in its limited form as work-shop wage policy – of the works councils, and this is true for Italy as well as for the Federal Republic. The unity of the decentralisation of bargaining and organisational policy in the form of the *delegati* movement creates a new relationship between workers and unions. The workers previously delegated the representation of their interests to the union machine; this machine used the active members in certain situations to put pressure on the employer, or, in other situations, to get certain decisions ratified; from these activities of the members, the machine received its legitimacy. The *delegati* movement abolished the traditional relation of delegation of interests and replaced it with one of participation, of control and confrontation.

The crucial point of the new relation between membership and union is not the relationship between *delegati* and the machine outside the workshop, since the *delegati* are the lowest echelon in the union hierarchy within the workshop – no matter how they enlarge their position. Instead, it is the relationship between the members and the shop steward (*Vertrauensmann*), between the work group and the *delegato*.

The work group constitutes the institutional basis for the *Vertrauensmann* in the Federal Republic as well as for the *delegato* in Italy. The concreteness of the interests which the work group possesses helps the workers to identify with those representatives to a degree that no other organisational structure of the labour movement has ever attained. But this identification is all the greater, the more chances there are for the enforcement of the workers' own interests. And here lies the decisive difference between the *delegato* and the *Vertrauensmann*: while the work group in Italy coincides with a specific unit of collective bargaining, it does not have any official importance at all for collective bargaining in the Federal Republic of Germany. The concern of the *delegato* and of the *Vertrauensmann* is defined in the German and in the Italian union movements in the same way: for example, the *Vertrauensmann* in IG

Metall is the 'legitimate spokesman and representative of interests' for his work group: 'it is . . . the concern of the shop steward to establish the function of the group as a union for the representation of its members' interests and as an organisational cell of IG Metall. He must form the group consciousness and determine the basic rules of behaviour (IG Metall 1972:10). Thus, he has the same socialising function as the *delegato*. However, he is elected only by the union members in his work group, but the degree of organisation among the workers in the larger West German workshops is very high, so that here the difference between union and work-force members is not relevant. Although the *Vertrauensmann* only represents the interests of union members, today, in comparison to earlier period, he is not supposed to 'leave [the unorganized workers] fully to themselves' (ibid.: 26).

The sphere of influence of the *Vertrauensleute* is supposed to be the 'neighbour groups' within the workshop. The unit of reference for its size is not the number of union members, but, as in Italy, the numbers of employees within the group. Numerically, it is limited to between five and twenty members, but in practice there are larger groups. The variability of the size of the groups corresponds to the definition of the homogeneous work group in Italy, except that the relationship between the *delegato* and the work group is less favourable in Italy: in an investigation at the end of 1972, which covered 40,000 *delegati* and about 900,000 workers, the average relationship was one delegate to 29 workers; it varied between one to 12 and one to 41. Since then it is supposed to have become even worse.

In general the 'neighbour groups' probably coincide with the formal work group; this is supposed 'to fulfill very specific duties within the framework of production, and this means that it is characterised by the co-operation of all group members on a certain task. That such a formal group is simultaneously the ideal "neighbour group" is easy to understand, since the continual co-operation and dependence upon one another encourages close, solidary relationships' (ibid. 8). The accent is placed, more strongly than in the Italian version, on communication between the group's members. The difference between the formal work group and the neighbour group lies, on the one hand, in 'the work effort expected by the employer' of the group, and, on the other hand, in the 'protection of common interests'. In addition, there is the concept of the informal group which has been adopted by the West German as well as by the Italian unions from American sociology. It has been reinterpreted by the unions as an instrument for a social offensive: 'Because the idea of united behaviour and of resistance is grounded in many informal groups, especially in the neighbour groups, these groups are the ideal starting-point for union work' (ibid. 9). Even the factors of unity, discipline and democracy which Garavani emphasised for the homogeneous work group are found in the West German definition of the neighbour or work group. Like the *delegati*, *Vertrauensleute* can be recalled at any time, even though removal from office is a very seldom practice in both countries.

The congregation of the shop stewards in a unified committee which corresponds to that of the *delegati* in the factory council, is called

the 'body of stewards' (*Vertrauenskörper*). In their sphere of influence, they encourage the union members to develop opinions and intentions; the committee represents the interests of the union and its members in the workshop. The *Vertrauensleute* are primarily the representatives of the union within the workshop, the lowest echelon in the union hierarchy: they make known the decisions and announcements of the unionist organs; their role in wage policy exists in their support of the local branch of the union during bargaining activities. The differences between the *Vertrauensleute* and the *delegati* result primarily from the restrictive interpretation of the rights in the German unions. While the representation of interests by the *Vertrauensleute* is limited to informal grievance procedures, the *delegato* possesses official powers concerning bargaining policy, although in this matter the restrictive function of West German labour law should not be ignored. Due to the concern of the *delegato* for the interests specific to the group, the work group was defined in Italy as homogeneous in matters of production, the organisation of labour and job environment. The direct mandate of the *delegato* reflects the homogeneity of the interests of the group's members.

The definition of the homogeneity of the work group proved to be the strength as well as the weakness of the *delegati* movement: the latter is particularly substantiated by the fact that the precision of the term's definition has no correspondences in shop-floor reality. For many work groups this term can easily be applied, but there are others where, for example, the job environment is uniform, but the composition of the group with regard to occupational histories and qualification of its members is very diverse. In many cases, the communication among the members of homogeneous work groups is made impossible by the working situation, while neighbourly communication with other workers does manage to continue in such a situation.

Until now the Italian unions have reacted to these problems with new definitions of homogeneity or more frequently with changes in the scale of the group (enlargement) in the workshops, which in a certain manner does solve the problem of homogeneity, but also loosens the relation between the group and its *delegato*. In contrast, the 'neighbour group' has the advantage that communication is a prerequisite for its existence and the identity of interests can be developed more easily the smaller the group. The less the identity of interests can be developed, and the fewer the possibilities for the assertion of common interests, then the more that factor will fail, which encourages participation on the basis of the collective representation of common interests.

The major difference between the two countries exists in the bargaining policy on the shop-floor level: while in Germany, official union bargaining activity does not exist on the shop-floor level (with some notable exceptions, as in the Volkswagen works), and the workshop wage policy of the works councils does not need the support of the shop stewards and usually would not seek it, in Italy the assembly of the *delegati*, the factory council, is the organ that has attained bargaining autonomy on the level of the workshop. This decentralisation makes participation of the members (and non-members) in

collective bargaining possible and necessary; it is a novelty in the history of the union. At least, there has been no example in recent time of a participation that was as great and as lasting.

The necessary precondition for such a policy which deliberately shifts the decision-making powers within the union to the rank and file, is the acceptance of a definition of the union as a class organisation. If the union originates from the necessity of the coalition of wage workers under capitalism, then it must conceive of itself as the congregation of virtually the entire working class and claim the right to speak and act in its stead. Then it should be no problem to the union if non-members participate in the election of the lowest union officials or if these officials represent the interests of all the members of their work groups. Then the problems which arise from the dual character of the delegate as the representative of the entire group of workers and the lowest official within the union hierarchy, could be solved. If, however, the union conceives of itself as an association of its members only, it will neither negotiate agreements for all of the workers, nor will it be willing to allow non-members any rights of co-determination within its organisation. It is clearly understandable that opening the union to non-members, the decentralisation of bargaining and organisational policy and greater participation in the union correspond to one another, just as do an associative concept of the union, the centralisation of bargaining and organisational policy and a limited participation.

A study in union sociology of the *delegati* movement has verified that it implemented a participation in the life of the union which is lasting and is not just limited to mere membership or support in a few specific moments. This has resulted in a stronger foothold for the union in the workshops: the presence of the *delegati* gives the workers a sense of proximity to the union; they feel better understood and protected from the workshop hierarchy. As in Germany, the possibility of direct contact is constantly mentioned. But the human ability to get close to other colleagues, which the *delegati* have undoubtedly achieved, is not the only concern; as a reflection of the union, the *delegati* also demonstrate their own capabilities for political leadership in the workshop bargaining struggles. They evoke a stronger participation than the union ever could from outside. The *delegati* movement has generally also induced greater politicisation and union organisation of wage labour in general, and especially of women and salaried and migrant workers (Censi *et al.* 1973: 171 ff.).

In the West German unions, however, the centralised bargaining policy correlates with a low level of participation, which is only raised during moments of conflict. The formal structures of the unions are undoubtedly democratic, but they generally adopt the principles of bourgeois democracy, i.e., substantial generality of the representation of interests, free mandate, periodic elections. The structure of bargaining policy, as the specific form of the representation of interest, developed according to these principles. Although wage policy is the primary concern of the unions, there is no original autonomous democratic structure in the unions that legitimates it. The

executive, and the regional leaders who are appointed by it, generally carry out collective bargaining on the basis of a general mandate. The collective bargaining commissions that exist on this level of the contract regions are determined in their composition by the guidelines of the executive; the share of full-time officials and of works councillors on leave from work is exceedingly large particularly in the large contract districts. In addition, the collective bargaining commissions are usually only consultative bodies that make suggestions to the executive concerning the impending decisions on wage policy. The participatory and democratic potential of the structure of the *Vertrauensleute* is depreciated by the impotence in matters of collective bargaining. From this viewpoint, they are in a situation similar to the union workshop sections of the Italian unions before 1969. Therefore, it is no wonder that the diffusion of information by the *Vertrauensleute* functions only to a limited degree; information presupposes communication and the possibility of participation – active as well as passive. Even though the new forms of organisation of the Italian unions on the shop floor tend, as Treu (1971: 159ff.) emphasised, to abolish the division between the union and the workers, especially in moments of decision, this can still be retracted in the waning phase of the mass movement and be reduced to a formality. This means that the council structures, like the organisations of the union's rank and file, do not alone provide protection against the actual re-establishment of the old relation between workers and unions and the latter's return to the mere 'struggle within the wage system'.

The 'struggle within the wage system' demands an autonomy of the subject who carries out the struggle, and this can only be the autonomy of the workers themselves, not directly that of the union. The union structures do, however, aid substantially in encouraging or handicapping this autonomy of the workers. Participation and delegation, decentralisation and centralisation of bargaining and organisational policy can clearly be related to corresponding socio-political tendencies of unionism. In this sense, the anti-capitalist potential of the union will be greater, the more strongly the union anticipates within itself the autonomy of the subjects who constitute the union.

#### NOTES

1. Decentralisation is understood here only as that movement which makes the members of the union again the subjects of the organisation which they founded, and does not mean the dissolution of the class-coherence of the union. The goal is not the isolation of the workers in work groups and workshop collectives, but, instead, the inversion of the pyramid of decision-making within the union as a class organisation, which naturally means the retention of the centralising function of the union as an institution outside the workshop.
2. An excerpt from a poll of *delegati* in thirteen workshops taken by Fabrizio d'Agostini for the weekly newspaper '*Rinascita*'. Generally, the 'most militant and influential delegates . . . of all political and unionist affiliation' were supposedly interviewed (d'Agostini 1974: 181).
3. The present article is an excerpt from a larger work: in order to conserve the main idea of the study despite the limited space here, the source material for the section up to the rise of the

*delegati* movement was reduced and the description of the *delegati* movement was limited to a few structural aspects. (For further information on the Italian social movement see the Italian national report in these volumes.) Further, we have dispensed with a detailed portrayal of the theoretical background (the theory of workforce co-operation, etc.) as well as with the description of the further development of the *Vertrauensleute* movement after 1969, and of the *delegati* movement after 1971/72. Although the September strikes of 1969 have led to the renewal of class struggles in Western Germany and thereby to the discussion of the decentralisation of bargaining and organisational policy, they have not effected any structural changes. In Italy, on the other hand, there was a regressive development following the large changes in the union and its policy in the cycle of labour struggle from 1968 to 1972, however, this situation does not change anything concerning the definition of those factors which in part helped these changes, in part are expressive of the movement.

## 6 *New Demands or the Demands of New Groups? Three Case Studies*

BERNDT KIRCHLECHNER

The concept of 'new demands' has played an important role in the discussions of the labour struggles which have broken out in various European countries since 1968/69. Political groups and sociological opinion have been divided on the question of whether the striking workers were making demands which called traditional trade union economism into question, whether they were fighting for qualitative or quantitative changes; in short, whether the content of the struggles was 'new' or 'old'. We too are among those who used this concept to distinguish the demands raised by West German workers since the strike wave of September 1969 from those of the preceding period. Our intent was to underscore the novel arguments introduced to justify the workers' claims. Demands which in their content, their quantitative extent or in their justification respected the rules of the capitalist logic of profitability, we called 'old'. They made the capitalist's ability to pay the measure of labour's claims; and they did not challenge such consecrated axioms of the capitalist theory of the just distribution of wealth as the notion that remuneration must depend on some calculation of the individual's contribution to production. We called those demands 'new', on the other hand, which implicitly or explicitly abandoned this logic by making the workers' essential needs the standard against which they measured themselves. Into this category fell the demand to abolish wage differentials, and the attempt to prevent capital from recouping increased wage costs by increasing piecework norms, introducing new technologies or the like.

A comparison of the goals of the various European labour struggles shows that 'new' demands with similar content have been introduced by comparable groups, albeit at different times. Substantial numbers of Italian workers demanded egalitarian wage increases and the reduction of the tempo of work as early as 1968/69 (Schneider, P., 1973: 135 – 162). In France these demands found widespread support in 1971/72 (Laboratoire de Sociologie de la Connaissance, 1974:22), in West Germany in 1973. But while old demands gave way to new in each country, in many cases new demands were supplanted by old. This fact alone makes 'age' uninteresting as an analytical

category; and we have come to the conclusion that instead of attempting to deduce the content of a demand from an abstract developmental logic, we ought to reconstruct its significance by attending carefully to the ways in which it grows out of and hence bears witness to the life led inside and outside the factory by those workers who raise and defend it.

With this methodological point in mind, the reader will understand why our primary task in this essay must be a contextual analysis of strike demands which takes special notice of their social – that is to say political, economic and technological – history. Only *after* such an analysis is complete can we return to the question of whether a categorical distinction between new and old will serve our purposes. Such a distinction is, in any event, splendidly irrelevant for the workers, who certainly do not formulate their demands according to whether they are old or new, traditional for their union, reformist, revisionist or revolutionary, but rather (if our hypothesis is correct) according to their estimate of which formulation will permit the best tactical representation of their consciously perceived interests. Current classificatory schemes are little more than a collection of those criteria according to which party strategists and sociologists give grades to the workers and their representatives.

In our attempt to analyse strike demands in the light of their technological, political and institutional particularity we shall not be able to draw evidence from representative and comparable studies. We shall have to rely on literature from the most diverse sources and corresponding to the most diverse needs. The authors of our sources are often members or supporters of political groups, not infrequently groups which have intervened with more or less success in the struggle in question. In such cases we will have to be alert to the effect the group's political position has had on the portrayal of events.

Apart from the heterogeneity of their contents and their greater or less fidelity to the facts of the cases, our sources are such that they do not permit us to make estimates of the quantitative significance of those demands whose content we do succeed in interpreting. The choice of the strikes to be analysed cannot therefore be guided by the intention to arrive at a series of statements with which to characterise a recent epoch in the development of class conflict. The defects of our sources and the dictates of our method make us choose to analyse politically significant strike movements, taking the diffuse notion of political significance as an indication that a particular struggle has disturbed the normal equilibrium of industrial relations.

In this essay we shall consider only those struggles in which manual workers of both sexes have been of predominant importance. This restriction is, however, in no way meant to suggest that analogous changes have not taken place in the content and form of the struggles waged by white-collar workers, though this has been less the case in Germany than in France, Italy and the UK. The nature of our sources also restricts the possibility of making international comparisons, so we shall limit our detailed discussion to case studies of three strikes in the West German automobile industry during the strike wave of 1973.

## THE CASE STUDIES

Of the three strikes, one was supported in the main by foreign women (Pierburg at Neuss), one by foreign men (Ford at Cologne) and one by German workers (Opel at Bochum). We have selected them from the mass of 335 strikes which took place between February and November 1973 because in each case the participants may be very crudely characterised as unskilled, young and (in respect of the country of employment) foreign. Despite this distinction, the strikes were in no way an isolated occurrence. They are part of a broad strike wave which followed the conclusion of the 1972/73 round of wage negotiations in the metal-working industry, the main outlines of which are sketched in the paper by Muller-Jentsch and Sperling in Volume 1.

### THE PIERBURG STRIKE<sup>1</sup>

A. Pierburg Autobaugerate KG (Neuss am Rhein) produces carburettors and gasoline pumps for automobiles. Pierburg is a family concern. Besides the main works in Neuss, the firm has wholly or partly-owned subsidiaries in France, Brazil, Mexico and Japan. The owner personally manages his industrial group. He founded the Neuss works in the 1950s, employing at the beginning 250 workers. By 1973 the number of employees had risen to 3700. Total sales amounted to 180 million DM in 1973, an increase from 130 million DM in 1972. Pierburg KG has a monopoly position in the West German carburettor market.

In addition to 350 white-collar workers, Pierburg employed about 850 German workers in 1973. Seventy per cent of the remaining employees are foreigners, and 70 per cent of the foreigners are women. The three largest contingents of female workers come from Greece (900), Turkey (850) and Yugoslavia (380). The women work on the assembly lines and individual machines as unskilled labourers. Seventy-three per cent of the women are grouped in the lowest wage category. Their take-home pay comes to 600 DM a month. (The average take-home pay of a West German worker was 1000 DM in 1973.) Pierburg's wage policy was simple and, for many years, 'successful'. The foreign women earned the least; then came the German women. Then, after a gap in the wage scale, came the foreign men; and finally, at the top, the skilled German workers.

The constant expansion of the plant was accompanied by a rigorously implemented programme of rationalisation. The pressure to produce more became noticeably greater. (In the last three years production on the carburettor assembly-line climbed from 700 to 1300 units per line per shift.) It has been claimed that woman workers who dared to make demands or voice complaints were on occasions threatened with extradition, and that those who fell ill were sometimes fired. Ignorance of the language by the workers was not assisted by the firm. In 1970 the women responded to their conditions with a strike in which they demanded the abolition of the then lowest wage

category. The *Betriebsrat* compromised: the first wage category was abolished, but the increase in real wages amounted to only 20 Pfennig an hour. Until 1972 the works council at Pierburg was passive and deferential to management. The *Betriebsräte* were all Germans, although, as we have seen, 70 per cent of the employees were foreigners. In 1972 a new *Betriebsrat* was elected which was more active in the defence of the workers. The precondition for this new policy was a more general politicisation of the plant set in motion and co-ordinated by the *Vertrauensleutekörper* in which foreign workers soon had a majority.

In 1968 there were 280 union members at the Pierburg KG; by 1974 the number was 2300. Workers of both sexes became more and more active inside the plant and the resistance to management's actions grew. Shortly before Whitsun 1973, approximately 300 women began a spontaneous strike. Their demands were concrete:

1. The existing lowest wage category should be abolished.
2. Those who had been employed for some time in the plant must receive higher pay than those just hired.
3. Since there are no clean jobs in the plant, all must receive a dirty-job bonus.
4. All workers, men and women alike, should get a pay rise of one DM an hour.
5. Women who worked on special machines must be promoted a wage category.
6. The time lost because of the meeting to formulate the demand must be paid by the firm.
7. All women who did heavy manual labour in the factory must be paid as much as men.
8. No one may be fired because of frequent illness.
9. Overtime may not be unjustly distributed.
10. Everyone should be given a paid half-day off per month if they want to see a doctor.
11. Housewives should be given one paid day off per month.
12. The firm must cover the increased costs of commuting.

The fact that the strike broke out two days before Whitsun suggests that the protest was spontaneous and not the result of political calculation. The strike could not be continued after the holiday, and the women did not succeed in broadening the strike to include other workers of either sex. Management promised to negotiate with the *Betriebsrat*; the negotiations dragged on for weeks. Aside from a few reclassifications into higher wage categories, there were no successes. The firm tried to defuse the situation with a 200 DM cost-of-living bonus, but without success.

In August a better-prepared strike was launched. Leaflets distributed after the Whitsun strike had laid the groundwork. In the meantime a series of other

more important strikes had taken place in West Germany; the press was full of (almost always critical) reports about them. A leaflet distributed on the morning of the strike listed the demands: one Mark an hour more for all; and abolition of the lowest wage category. The rest of the demands from the Whitsun strike were not taken up, but later two new demands found their way into the list: 'full pay for the strike days', 'no repression, no firings'. The strike was conducted most actively by a group of 250 to 500 foreign women who maintained a permanent strike assembly in front of the factory gates. Almost all the foreigners demonstrated their solidarity with the women, though many of them remained – without working – at their work-places. On Thursday the skilled German workers downed tools as well; almost the whole work force was on strike. The strike assembly in front of the factory gates lasted from Monday to Friday. The assembled women called out their demands and urged those still inside the factory to come out and join them. The assembly was an expression of the women's determination not to go back to work until their demands had been met. They played music, danced, ate and drank together, carried on discussions. One day they gave roses to those who passed them on their way to work in the factory. The police attacked the assembly repeatedly, and there was physical violence between foreign women and the German police. Some women were arrested, and many were frightened away from the assembly, but those who remained were more resolute than ever. The women left negotiations with management completely in the hands of the *Betriebsrat* which supported the strike within the limits of its legal obligations. Most important, the council openly acknowledged the justice of the women's demands and defended them. This gave the German workers, skilled as well as unskilled, the opportunity to show their solidarity. The negotiations with management were not, however, subject to any control from below and very little information reached the strikers. A series of leftist groups had distributed leaflets in front of the factory gates and had helped supply food, drink, music and megaphones. Countless expressions of solidarity arrived from political and factory groups in West Germany and other countries as well. Despite all this, the strike was the work of the men and women workers at Pierburg. Although they had no explicit political programme, they knew how to defend their interests. Neither Pierburg workers who were themselves members or supporters of political groups nor the groups themselves had a significant influence on the strike.

The local office (*Ortsverwaltung*) of IG Metall did not support the strike and distanced itself in principle from the concept of 'wildcat' strikes. None the less, the union conceded the justice of the demand for the abolition of the lowest wage category, and claimed that management's unreasonableness was to blame for the outbreak of the strike. The union rejected the demand for 'one Mark more an hour for everyone' as an inadmissible criticism of its wage settlement. On Thursday, under pressure from the organisation's executive council (*Hauptvorstand*), the local office entered the negotiations. On the other side of the table sat a representative of the Industrialists' Association. At first the plant management refused to take part in the bargaining sessions. It

launched a press campaign in which the strike was made out to be the work of communist agitators, who, in fact, had only a few supporters in the plant. These few were threatened with the loss of their jobs. None of the attempts to beat the strikers into submission succeeded, neither the interventions by the police nor the attempt to sever communications between the active strikers outside the plant and those remaining inside by erecting barricades or making threats. The strike ended finally with a victory: the lowest wage category was abolished, and all workers were guaranteed a wage increase of between 53 and 65 Pfennig an hour. The firm agreed to pay wages for three of the four strike days, and the disciplinary measures taken against the strikers did not go beyond warnings.

### THE STRIKE AT FORD<sup>2</sup>

Ford-Germany, with its principal works in Cologne-Niehl, is the third largest car producer in West Germany (after VW and Opel). Production in 1973 was down 10.6 per cent in comparison with the preceding year. The works in Cologne-Niehl produce the Capri for export to the US, the Consul, the Grenada and spare parts, motors and transmissions for other assembly plants, some of them in the US and England. At the end of 1972 the works employed 31,370 persons: 24,310 manual, 7,060 non-manual. Two-thirds of the workers were foreigners, including 12,000 Turks, 1,500 Italians, and 600 Yugoslavs. The number of women workers was small. Almost no Germans worked in production; they are either foremen or skilled workers. They clearly had the better and the better-paid jobs. To the foreigners they were superiors, task masters: the privileged. The assembly lines are manned almost exclusively by the Turks. In comparison with them, the Italians and the Yugoslavs are themselves privileged. Ford tends to move foreign workers from one machine to the next, so they rarely have time to accustom themselves to one workplace. This extreme mobility allows management to raise production norms almost at will: the workers, always new on the job, are in no position to compare them. Competitive instincts and mutual mistrust between nationalities assist the management strategy. As a rule, the Turks are the most vulnerable because of the language barrier and their especially unfavourable legal status as citizens of a non-EEC country. Seven thousand Turks, 600 Italians and 200 Yugoslavs live in company-owned apartments. The terms of occupancy are simple: no job at Ford, no apartment. The occupants are unmarried or have left their families at home. They live segregated socially and sexually in factory barracks. They work as much as they can: overtime and extra shifts are regarded as rewards because they provide a chance to earn as much as possible as soon as possible, and so to speed the hour of return to the native land.

Ford has acquired a reputation among some workers for hard working conditions, fast assembly lines and low wages (Delp *et al.* 1974:161). Wages are lower than those paid by VW, Mercedes and Opel, but relatively good for the Cologne area. Workers at Ford are salaried, not paid according to piece

rates. But the base salaries are supplemented by a series of bonuses and extras which are awarded at the foreman's discretion and give him a means of disciplining his subordinates. Because of these discretionary powers and the way they are exercised, the foremen (almost all of them German) are especially resented by the Ford workers.

At the beginning of the 1960s only 4.6 per cent of Ford workers were organised in the union. IG Metall began a long-term campaign to put an end to this embarrassing situation. The organisers of this campaign were divided into two factions: a progressive group which, under the banner of 'plant-level bargaining' (*betriebliche Tarifpolitik*) wanted to mobilise the workers at the base by decentralisation of the system of wage bargaining; and a second group chiefly interested in increasing the number of union members (and dues revenue). The second group co-operated with the *Hauptvorstand* of IG Metall, the *Ortsverwaltung* and the *Betriebsräte* at Ford.

It was the second group which, not surprisingly, prevailed. It took over the posts in the *Betriebsrat* and organised the *Vertrauensleutekörper* from above, hierarchically, so that union delegates from the shop floor were dependent on the *Betriebsrat* instead of being able to control it. The council and the *Vertrauenskörperleitung* (shop-steward leadership) are ardent partisans of 'social partnership', which means that they always have a friendly ear for management's arguments. In both the council and the delegates' committee the foreigners are extremely under-represented. Of the 53 members of the *Betriebsrat* only five are foreigners (though two-thirds of the workers are foreign); and only two of these are Turks. Not one of the Turkish councillors has been relieved of his normal job responsibilities.

The foreigners' relations with the union and the *Betriebsrat* are extremely poor. In spite of this, 90 per cent of the Turks are organised in IG Metall as compared with 50 per cent of the German workers. Many of the Turks have applied for membership out of ignorance: when they sign up to work at Ford, they find an application form among the other papers. Management, *Betriebsrat* and union tend to become for them all part of the same blurred institution.

There are few strikes at Ford. The last work-stoppage of consequence had begun as a two-hour warning strike organised by IG Metall in 1970 as part of the ritual of wage negotiations (Schmidt, E., 1974:31). The Turks, however, took control of the situation and continued to strike for the rest of the day. There were clashes between strikers and strike breakers; machines were destroyed. Besides demanding higher wages, the Turks demanded that the speed of the assembly lines be reduced. The strike was the first barely controllable flare-up of the foreigners' rage.

The cost-of-living bonus was discussed in the spring and early summer of 1973. A series of small, unsuccessful actions – a minor warning strike, petitions – were organised to lend weight to the demands. Before the beginning of the factory's summer vacation, management launched a 'quality improvement' campaign. For the assembly-line workers this meant more work for the same money. In addition, there was less overtime work. Since the

vacation bonus was calculated according to total pay (including overtime) earned in the three months preceding the summer break, the reduced work schedule meant a bonus cut as well.

After the official summer break many of the workers were still on holiday and the situation became more acute. Those who were present were obliged to take up the slack left by those who had not yet returned. A large number of machines had been adapted to new production requirements, which for many workers meant working into a new job under particularly difficult conditions. A rumour was circulating that 500 of the late-comers (above all the foreigners) were to be fired. The remaining workers would then be permanently responsible for their tasks. During a factory assembly on 14 August management denied the rumour but threatened disciplinary measures without excluding the possibility of dismissals. Many of the skilled German workers could not understand the 'tardiness' of the Turks, who often had to sacrifice one week of their four-week vacation just to reach their native villages in Turkey. The discussion of management's threats and the wage demands (60 Pfennig an hour for all had meanwhile become a universally accepted figure) was animated by a series of leaflets and factory newspapers prepared by various political groups and distributed inside and outside the works. There was already strike talk. The *Betriebsrat* and IG Metall did nothing.

In the end, 300 of the Turkish late-comers were fired, effective immediately. For management the Turks' 'irresponsibility' was most opportune: sales had begun to decline noticeably. During the shift on Friday, 24 August, a strike broke out spontaneously on the final assembly-line. A Turk, driven into a rage by a foreman who wanted him to take over yet another task, called his mates out on strike. In a few minutes the whole line stopped work; the workers formed a procession and marched through the works; the demands were hurriedly painted on placards. At six o' clock 1000 workers, including Germans, held the first strike meeting. Three demands were formulated: those fired must get their jobs back; one Mark for everyone; the speed of the assembly-lines must be reduced. A German and a Turk explained and justified the demands; they were greeted by much applause. The *Betriebsrat* exhorted the workers to go back to their places. It claimed to have entered into negotiations with management. Management's representative spoke as well. The Turks were suspicious. They marched for a second time through the works to call upon the others to join the strike. The foremen sent home all those who were still working, including workers from the late shift.

A large group of strikers spent the whole night in the plant in order to be able to pass the word to everyone. On Monday, after several additional marches through the plant a large strike meeting took place. The following demands were made: one Mark for everyone; six weeks of paid vacation for everyone; those fired must be rehired; the tempo of work must be slowed; no disciplinary measures against the strikers; the strike days must be paid. Many Germans were present at this meeting too. The council again attempted to cajole the men back to work, but following a Turkish proposal an

independent strike committee was elected consisting of nine Turks, two Italians, one Yugoslav and two Germans, to be responsible for negotiating with management. Several members of the strike committee openly supported the (Maoist) KDP, which from this point on made itself the organisational backbone of the strike. It is this development above all which scared the German workers and allowed the *Betriebsrat*, IG Metall, the Ford management and the press to begin a witch-hunt against the strike committee. Herr Willi Brandt, the Chancellor, appealed for moderation in a television speech. The split between the German workers, who oriented themselves on the *Betriebsrat*, and the foreigners, who supported the strike committee, became deeper. The German *Vertrauensleute* remained passive; during the whole strike they did not hold a single meeting. The strike became increasingly a strike of the Turks, all the more so after the results of the council's negotiations with management had been announced.

The Turks marched repeatedly through the plant, which they had occupied since the Monday night. Strikers blocked the factory gates, and painted the walls with strike slogans. They arranged to eat and drink together, to play, sing and dance to Turkish music; and together they prayed to Allah that the strike might come to a good end. Most of the Germans remained, at management's request, at home. They followed the strike of their fellow-workers on television.

The strike committee would sit down with management only on the condition that the *Betriebsrat* was not party to the negotiations; for its part, management refused to treat with the strike committee. The police encircled the plant; there were police assaults against the strike pickets at the gates; and there were rumours that plain clothes men were inside the factory. In order to protect the strike committee from arrest the strikers demanded to hold three factory councillors hostage while the committee and *Betriebsrat* met together. Three councillors put themselves at the strikers' disposal. Until the strike was smashed, the strikers continued to look to the strike committee, which was more than marginally influenced by the KDP, and which was constantly protected by a group of 'bodyguards'. The Turks' main representative exercised an almost charismatic authority. The negotiations were broken off without result.

The *Betriebsrat*, management, representatives of the Turkish consulate and IG Metall attempted with all the means at their disposal to split the strikers or coax them back to work. On Thursday, 30 August three hundred to four hundred persons including foremen, white-collar workers, and (it was alleged) policemen in work clothes and members of the council mounted a 'counter-demonstration' complete with 'We want to work' signs. The strikers were chased through the works buildings and dispersed. The strike committee was arrested. They were not prepared for this attack (for violence of any sort for that matter) and they reacted helplessly. The strike was smashed.

The strike's successes amounted to those concessions which management had announced earlier: a one-time cost-of-living bonus of 280 DM, a small increase in the 13th month bonus, full pay for strike days (activists excluded)

and a re-examination of the dismissals. The result was unambiguously tailored to suit the German workers: none of the demands of special interest to the Turks was met. Thereafter came the purge. One hundred Turks were given immediate notice; another 600 quit.

### THE STRIKE AT OPEL-BOCHUM<sup>3</sup>

The factory at Bochum is the second largest of the three Opel plants in West Germany. Opel is a fully-owned subsidiary of General Motors. Opel is after VW the second largest producer of passenger cars in West Germany. The firm came to Bochum in the wake of the crisis in the Ruhr mining industry. By the end of the 1950s, the number of unemployed and the drop in municipal tax revenues made it imperative to restructure the region's industrial base. Opel was offered a subsidy of between 80 and 100 million DM for the construction of its plant. Production began in 1962. The works employed 18,950 persons at the end of 1972. It makes the medium-sized Kadett, Ascona, Manta and GT (552, 701 units in 1972). Although 1972 was, according to General Director Cunningham, the 'most successful' of Opel's 110 years, sales for the first half of 1973 unmistakably reflected the signs of the general crisis of the car industry. At first, the effects of the crisis were confined to the main works at Rüsselsheim, where the large models manufactured there could not be sold and all hiring was stopped. Six hundred Turkish workers were supposed to be transferred from Rüsselsheim to Bochum. In the first quarter of 1973, production had increased in Bochum by 22.3 per cent.

The works in Bochum consist of three production complexes: Unit 1 (the main works, metal presses, radiators, chassis, paint and finish, final assembly); Unit 2, chassis and motors; and the spare parts depot, Unit 3. Units two and three are adjacent to one another, and both are separated by about 5 kilometers from Unit 1.

Of the 18,950 persons employed at Opel Bochum in 1973, 2860 were foreigners, of whom 1790 were Spaniards, 390 Turks, 370 Greeks and 137 Italians. The percentage of foreigners in the work force (15 per cent) was thus small compared with Rüsselsheim (25 per cent) and Ford-Cologne (over 50 per cent). This means that at Opel-Bochum many of the unskilled jobs on the assembly lines and machines had to be filled by Germans. The distribution of unskilled workers in the Ruhr area is not typical of West Germany as a whole; and the percentage of unemployed in the region is generally above the national average. During the early 1960s many jobless miners found work at Opel, and even today 3000 of them work there.

It is rather characteristic of the Bochum plant that the work force is quite young (34 is the average age); and that there is no core of experienced skilled workers (a 'stabilising element which hinders radicalisation' (*Die Zeit*, 1973) in other plants) such as that at Rüsselsheim, where the fathers and grandfathers of a large proportion of the workers were themselves Opel employees.

The *Betriebsrat* at Opel-Bochum is sympathetic to management, and so is the company-wide council (*Gesamtbetriebsrat*). It is closely connected with the SPD in Bochum. Since 1972, a leftist faction has been represented in the *Betriebsrat* despite a massive official propaganda campaign. Those councillors who had run on the opposition ticket against the official candidates of IG Metall were expelled from the union (because of leftist deviation) or barred from holding union office. Some members of this opposition (Group of the Opposed Trade Unionists, GOG) were fired by management with the support of the majority faction of the *Betriebsrat*. The GOG is quite active in the works and keeps the workers constantly informed about the activity of the majority faction in the *Betriebsrat*.

The immediate history of the strike began in late spring and early summer 1973, when the workers were obliged to work every Saturday to meet the production schedule. After the factory vacation in July, the special shifts were cancelled. The workers realised how little they actually earn in a normal 40-hour week.

On 14 August a group of *Vertrauensleute* demanded from the *Betriebsrat* that the latter should extract a 250–300 DM cost-of-living bonus from management. The council passed only the lower limit of this demand on to management, thereby arousing the wrath of the *Vertrauensleute* whose assembly then resolved to demand explicitly that 300 DM be given to all. The council refused for a second time to sponsor this demand and again communicated the 250 DM demand to management. Management refused to discuss any cost of living bonus at all.

Several days later, when management announced its rejection of the demands the *Vertrauensleute* distributed a leaflet. Work stopped in Units 1 and 2. The skilled workers on the metal presses in Unit 1 were the first to go out on strike: in a 1970 strike they had also been the first to walk off the job. They begin to march as a group through the works, demanding 300 DM for all and calling upon their fellow-workers to join them. All workers, Germans and foreigners alike, joined the strike. As at Ford and Pierburg, the foremen and white-collar workers did not participate.

The late shift continued the strike. In the course of the afternoon, Unit 3 stopped work as well. Nineteen thousand workers were on strike. Those in Unit 2 left the plant buildings and walked to a large field on company grounds where they played soccer and card games and discussed the strike. In Unit 1 the foremen attempted to use threats to keep the workers at their jobs. They repeatedly tried to set the machines and assembly line in motion again. No sooner had they started them up than a procession of strikers formed and brought them to a halt. Management announced that it would not enter negotiations as long as the strike continued. The workers wanted to strike 'until management makes an offer'. In Russelsheim the *Gesamtbetriebsrat* and management met for a routine conference. Management offered to negotiate a 'production and working conditions' bonus of between 7 and 12 Pfennig an hour. The workers refused the offer. In order to increase the pressure on management, the strikers prevented the transport of assembled vehicles. They

blocked the tracks in front of the railway wagons on to which the cars had been loaded. The strike demands were discussed and new ones added: cost of living bonus of 300 DM; time lost for the strike must be paid; one day paid holiday as compensation for the Saturday shifts worked before the factory vacation; a raise in the Christmas bonus; and changes in the working hours, and an eight-hour day with paid breaks.

Management made a new offer which the strikers rejected but which the *Betriebsrat* presented as a victory. Again and again the council urged the workers to return to their jobs. The IG Metall local office (*Ortsverwaltungsstelle*) also tried to talk the strikers into going back to their jobs. But the strikers did not feel themselves represented by the union. The *Vertrauensleute*, however, make a tactical retreat and presented a shortened list of demands: 180 DM cost of living bonus; 15 Pfennig more an hour beginning on 1 January 1974; no repression against individuals. The last demand referred to management's not too subtle hints at forthcoming disciplinary measures. The foremen were busy compiling blacklists of active strikers; photographs were being taken all over the plant; plain-clothes policemen and a reinforced contingent of company police roved about observing selected workers. Although there was no official strike committee to co-ordinate the resistance, processions formed spontaneously and marched through the works whenever there was danger that strike breakers or intimidated workers were about to resume work.

A letter from management threatening reprisals reached the workers and (more important) their wives at home over the weekend. IG Metall called the *Vertrauensleute* together and tried to bring them to appeal to the workers to end the strike. The factory group of the SPD made the same appeal to its members. The plain-clothes men in the plant were reinforced.

On the Monday the strike was smashed. The plant was full of police in plain clothes, company police, company firemen, foremen and white-collar workers who dispersed every gathering of workers, took pictures and threatened the men with the loss of their jobs. The *Betriebsrat* and the IG Metall urged the men to go back to work. The telephone connection between Units 1 and 2 was interrupted; there was no longer any way of knowing what the other workers were doing; men in each unit were constantly told that their mates in the other were back at work.

The workers' gains were as follows: 180 DM as a cost-of-living bonus to be paid in the form of a 'production and piece-rate' bonus which would later be consolidated in the basic rate; a lump sum cost-of-living bonus of 100 DM; and a 100 DM advance on the Christmas bonus. The workers in other Opel plants, who did not join the strike, received these benefits as well. The white-collar workers were 'rewarded' with 100 DM per man. The strike time was not paid, so the Bochum workers had gained in the end perhaps 100 DM for their efforts while those who did not strike earned considerably more. In the following weeks ten men were fired. The *Betriebsrat* gave its assent to the dismissals.

## SUMMARY THESES

Until the mid-1960s, West European motor manufacturers could expand production without running up against the limits of demand. The European market seemed insatiable. Since 1965, however, at least the limits of growth have been visible: from that year the annual rate of growth of licenses for new cars in West Europe has constantly declined.

The 'oil crisis' became a symbol of the end of the expansion. At the same time, despite the first warning signs, the technically advanced productive capacity continued to grow (on the same technological base) until the outbreak of the 'crisis'. The outward expression of this contradictory development was ever more intense competition among car producers. The result of this was in turn a process of concentration of capital. The pressure of competition led to a growing industry-wide unification of the techniques of production and the concomitant organisation of work.

In all car factories and in those which supply them the increased use of assembly-line production methods and the ever greater division of labour have meant that a growing percentage of the work force are un- or semi-skilled. The increasing use of unskilled labour is the newest 'technical breakthrough' in the industry. Or, put the other way round, precisely because they have few consequential technical innovations in the industry, the increases in productivity necessary to meet the competition could be achieved only by reorganisation of work methods (Kern 1974); simplification and de-qualification of work, reduction of the number of workers servicing one machine or performing one task, increases in the piece-rate norms and the tempo of work, introduction of job evaluation schemes, increases in the length of the average working day through overtime and extra shifts. These 'new' jobs are filled more and more by a group of workers who are themselves 'new' in the sense that they have only recently been imported into the world of industrial production. In its search for cheap labour, capitalism is likely to settle upon one of two solutions. Either it locates its factories in 'backward' regions characterised by relative unemployment or under-employment and recruits its labour force from a population accustomed to working on the land or in artisan industries; or they move to industrial centres and employ those who have been forced out of a declining industry (Bochum) or foreign labour (Cologne, Neuss). In the latter case the foreigners are generally immigrants from rural or non-industrial areas: at Pierburg, for example, the Greek, Turkish and Yugoslav women are generally the wives of men originally from such areas who work now in plants in the Neuss area. At Ford-Cologne the Turks fit this description. A similar situation is found in other countries and the phenomenon is discussed elsewhere in this volume by Baudouin *et al.*

We shall adopt the term 'mass worker' (Roth 1974) to describe this new type of wage labourer who, without skills, with no pride of workmanship, often uprooted from his culture and his native country must be as mobile as international capital itself (Alquati 1974; Geiselberger 1972) – without, of

course, the privilege of being able to reduce his life to a problem of compound interest. Nothing but the naked necessity of material reproduction and the hope that he can earn a relatively high income in a relatively short time drives him from his native region or his original occupation; nothing but this need and hope ties him to the factory in which he works and which he can only hate.

These workers have as a rule no traditional loyalties to unions or political organisations (Eckart *et al.* 1974). They evaluate these organisations instrumentally, according to the use they may be in securing short-run improvements in wages or working conditions. Long-term political goals are not part of the calculus of interest. (Compare the differing relation of the Pierburg women and the Turks at Cologne to their plant and union representatives.)

Within the West German working class, the opposite of the unskilled or de-qualified, young and uprooted mass workers are the skilled German workers. Their relationship to their jobs is founded on a traditional professional and organisational socialisation. It is much more stable and self-confident. (Kern and Schumann 1970). Economically they are more secure and better paid; in the factory they are privileged in comparison with the mass workers. The committees and councils in the plants and unions are completely in their hands (the mass workers are hopelessly under-represented at every level in the unions (Eckart *et al.* 1974; ch 7; Bergmann *et al.* 1975: Part 2, 89)). They are bound by traditional loyalties to the unions and the SPD. From the 1920s on, most of the various groups of shop-floor delegates who opposed union policy within the organisation have also consisted of representatives of this group. They have long experience with labour struggles and have devised strategies which, especially during boom times, allow them to achieve substantial successes without engaging in open conflict.

The goals which the mass workers articulate in the eruption of their discontent, goals whose achievement is often anticipated in the concreteness of the struggle, are their answers to the development of factory labour which we have been describing.

These demands are, moreover, not born in the heads of leftist strategists. They are the autonomous reaction of the mass workers to their work and to the lives they are forced to lead. The unity of life and work is reflected, for example, in the Pierburg women's demand for a paid housewives' day or in their demand that no one should have to forfeit his wages in order to visit a doctor. The rent strikes of foreign families (Hauserrat Frankfurt 1974) or protests against the conditions in works housing also refer to this unity, although these latter demands have been raised in West Germany independently of the struggles in the factory. As to the question of whether the demands of these workers are truly 'new', we can answer that they are certainly new in the sense that, reflective of changed conditions of living and working as they are, they open the way to the formation of new coalitions of fractions of the working class. Only in the context of such coalitions will the struggles of the mass workers pass beyond the phase of an anti-capitalist rebellion born at

least in part of the autonomy of isolation and reveal their full contents.

By reducing demands to realistic objects of negotiation and by seeking consensus with the industrialists, the unions give the demands a reformist turn and rob them of their explosive force. This is above all true for the large, centralised unions with their wealth of tradition, irrespective of whether they pursue Social Democratic (DGB) or Communist (CGT, CGIL) politics. Under the influence of their ideologies (division of the economic from the political struggle; preservation of the 'unity' of the working class, by means of a policy of defending the lowest common denominator of interests and thus neglecting the problems of under-privileged groups), they tend to narrow down demands to an economic core and to make the parties to which they are allied responsible for securing redress of the political 'remainder'. The same motives lead them to generalise demands, so lifting them above the level of the factory and making them a fit subject for centralised discussions.

It is rare for the unions to see no justice at all in a particular demand. But in the process of elevating the demand from the factory floor and rendering it 'realisable' within the framework which capital accepts (precisely because this acceptance does not endanger the system of capitalism itself), the unions deform them and make it possible for capital to turn them again to its purposes. The demands lose their autonomous character.

A series of less centralised unions, which, relatively unencumbered by tradition, were able to re-educate themselves during the 1960s, could react much more flexibly to the demands of the mass workers and were thus able to help them articulate their goals at the factory level. The CISL, CFDT and several British unions are examples of this line of development. Unlike the strike waves in Italy in 1968/69 (Cialaloni 1972: 51–70) and in France in 1972/73 (Laboratoire de Sociologie de la Connaissance 1974: 87), the strike movement in West Germany did not lead to increased participation of the unskilled workers in the unions. We have seen in the account of the strikes at Ford and Opel how deep the crevasse is which separates the official organisation and the mass workers. Naturally this crevasse did not escape the notice of the unions and they began to consider how best to integrate these newcomers to the West German working class. But the economic crisis whose effects became more and more noticeable from the winter of 1973 on, has produced problems of more immediate importance to the union leaders.

Finally, in order to exclude the possibility of misunderstandings, we shall resume our main thesis once again. We do *not* claim that the demands of the mass workers are in principle inimical to the capitalist system while the demands of the skilled workers and their unions in principle conform to the prerequisites of the system and can so be integrated in it. We have tried, so far as is possible, to avoid the problem of essences and have attempted instead to underscore the tendential differences in the form and content of struggles led by these two factions of the working class. Under certain economic and technological conditions, the mass workers are able to formulate their demands in a more spontaneous, concrete and immediate way undistorted by such political and tactical considerations of teleological character as are

characteristic of Social Democratic and the traditional Communist union and party strategists. Mass workers do not fight for abstract socialist goals, for a better life in some future, but instead for the immediate abolition of working and living conditions which they can no longer endure. In this urgency is to be found both the source of the explosive force of their demands and the struggles which surge up and around them - but also the limits of that force. Here is where politics must begin: the task is not to bemoan the fragmentation of the working class but to release the power which lies hidden within it.

#### NOTES

1. See Autorenkollektiv Pierburg-Neuss, 1974.
2. Arbeitskampf 1973, Redaktionskollektiv 'express', 1974: 101; RGO, 1973; WWA, 1973.
3. Redaktionskollektiv 'express', 1974 95; WWA, 1973.

# 7 *The Relationship between Trade Union Action and Political Parties*

RAINER DEPPE, RICHARD HERDING  
AND DIETRICH HOSS

'Fifty years from-now, we'll have had a big revolution. It will start in the West, in France or Italy, where left-wing parties are very strong. The people can be clubbed and shot ninety-nine times, just like they have been doing in Italy now, but it won't work the hundredth time. Or else, a big strike wave will trigger the revolution. In France and Italy, there is a lot more dissatisfaction than here. But here too, workers are growing restless. . . . The bosses know what's in store for them.'

West German steel worker, 1953/54 (quoted in Popitz *et al.* 1957:222)

## PREFATORY REMARK

This paper aims, not at historical description, but at an analytical outline of the relationship between unions and political parties in a period of rising class struggles, along four main ideas:

1. From the early 1960s there was a general tendency of governments to integrate trade unions in incomes policy institutions; in this they were encouraged by the co-operative<sup>1</sup> attitude of the unions, regardless of differences in traditions and political affiliations.
2. These attempts suffered a number of failures at the end of the sixties. In some countries rank-and-file activity has disturbed and at times even defeated them. The governments, however, try to restabilise the co-operation under the new conditions, so far with no lasting success.
3. The 'new' strata of the working class – unskilled, semi-skilled, women, foreign, and young workers – have an increased role in disturbing co-operative patterns of union politics.
4. The political radicalisation of trade unions, even under multiple unionism, depends among other factors on the existence of left-wing political opposition to Social-Democratic or Communist mass parties.

As a general tendency, the relationship between rank and file, unions and parties will also differ depending on cyclical changes in the economies. In the boom periods when concessions are more easily gained from employers, conflicts are most likely: between parties (particularly if in government) commending wage restraint, and the unions under rank-and-file pressure, and between union leadership and the rank and file (e.g., West Germany 1969–71; Italy 1968–71). In periods of business decline, when the working class is forced to defend itself against attacks on jobs and living conditions, there is hardly a chance of economic success at the plant level or by tough wage bargaining on a wider scale. Commitment then moves to the political field; workers expect political measures to safeguard their interests. As a rule, working-class-based parties and the unions take up these expectations by increased co-operation in reform politics or at least in programmes of state intervention. These, however, are mostly tied to more or less far-reaching agreements on wage restraint. Depending on national and historical variations such a closer relationship of party, unions and rank and file may lead to either increased discipline or intensified demands on the part of labour. The situation in West Germany since the strikes in the public services and Brandt's decline in 1974 may serve as an example of the former possibility: the employer-backed austerity policy of the Schmidt Government is largely unopposed. Labour's victory in Britain after the miners' strike in 1974 is characteristic of the second possibility. Although it was tied to a 'social contract' which implied wage restraint, at least for the first period of the new government its momentum helped the British working class to make some far-reaching economic gains. The situation in Italy has been somewhat similar since about 1973.

Of course, the relationship between the business cycle and the development of social movements must not be construed in a mechanical manner. It is modified or overwhelmed by various national and historical conditions. The most outstanding case in point is France. Here too we have the correlation of economic crisis and adoption of the political level by working-class action since about 1972. But the working-class parties are not openly committed to wage restraint. One of the main reasons is that participation in government is not immediately impending.

## UNIONS AND POLITICS: THE ORGANISATIONAL DUALISM FACING THE RISE OF WORKING-CLASS MILITANCY

The division of labour between parties and unions in the working-class movement was established as a principle at the turn of the century, when the Social-Democratic parties of (Continental) Western Europe turned to reformist practice while keeping revolutionary programmes. Parties were confined to parliamentary activity, while the unions professed neutrality in strictly political matters. This accompanied the centralisation of trade union

organisations. The rather conservative politics of the trade union apparatuses governed the parties under the cover of mutual dependence and support. In the present phase of capitalist development the relations between the unions and the political parties with which they are respectively allied are marked above all by the tendency to associate workers' organisations with the state system of 'crisis management'.

The unions have often incurred conflicts with the political parties to which they were affiliated. As a result of the higher degree of control of the unions by the rank and file they are no longer always moderating forces, but sometimes even centres of radicalisation. This development has run contrary to attempts to depoliticise the unions and make of them mere economic interest-groups. Instead, in this period of intense class struggles unions in various countries have become more like 'class unions' (*sindacati di classe*). This tendency varies tremendously by countries. It comprises the following aspects:

- (1) The official criterion of union organisation is increasingly working-class affiliation rather than factional or non-class criteria: unions composed by *occupation* merge into industrial unions (Britain); unions divided by *religious confession* undergo a process of deconfessionalisation and subsequent merger or unity of action (France, Italy; to a lesser degree Belgium and Netherlands); unions constituted by *political affiliation* take independent stands or enter processes of merger or unity of action (Italy, France).
- (2) Unions extend the range of their activity and objectives to the entire field of politics. In *Britain*, shifts to the left in major trade unions have been straining their relationship with the Labour Party (Minkin 1974: 22). In *France*, although the CGT still almost perfectly realises the transmission-belt model of the union-party dualism, it calls with increased frequency for unity of action with other parties, and is certainly more active politically than it used to be. The CFDT, on the other hand, considers the union an organisation with political positions of its own (Reynaud 1975: 223 f.). In *West Germany*, after the Social Democrats entered a coalition government with the Christian Democrats in 1966, sections of the unions considered it their duty now to represent class interests politically themselves ('inversion of positions', as Messelken put it). After the Social Democratic victory of 1972, the unions were reminded harshly that they could not consider themselves 'part of the winning troops'. In *Belgium*, both the Social Democratic and the Christian unions were slightly radicalised and became more autonomous, and seem to play an increasingly important political role relative to the parties, if only for the reason that they are not as much affected by regionalism. In *Italy*, autonomous political initiatives have covered, under rank-and-file pressure, the entire field of reforms (Pizzorno 1971: 137).

Contrary to what most sociologists believed before, the radicalisation of unions was the result, not of their allegiance to political parties but rather of increased autonomy from them – a process which most industrial relations observers consider usually leads to business unionism. However, the whole

process is so contradictory that 'unions' or (to a lesser degree) 'parties' as much cannot be our units of analysis. The remarkable fact is the widening pluralism and factionalism *within* both types of organisations.

Differences in origins do not necessarily explain the variety which exists. British unions are frequently in disagreement with the Labour Party, which they founded; but so are Continental unions which had been founded by the parties. Single or multiple, political or confessedly neutral unions do not follow decisively distinct paths. Under explicit political unionism, intra-union opposition can refer to the political aspiration of the union; under multiple unionism, bureaucracy has not been able universally to tighten control of changes in politics and demands. What has changed is not so much the official union structures as the rank and file. In the face of diminishing rates of economic growth, its unrest has made necessary since the 1960s the unions' participation in government incomes policies and planning. Independent of their political status, however, all unions (except the Dutch for some time) opposed a general statutory regulation of wages that would formally take control of the collective-bargaining process out of the unions' hands. Even co-operative trade unions must retain their power to balance members' interests with system constraints (Bergmann, Jacobi and Muller-Jentsch, 1975). Their co-operation, particularly in the 'hard' realm of wage policy, must remain largely informal, regardless of political commitment, as long as they remain unions. Within the political range of West-European unions, the radicalisation of the class base rather than the radicalism of the official political position determines the degree of union participation in the state apparatus.

## THE CRISIS OF CO-OPERATION BETWEEN UNIONS AND THE CAPITALIST STATE

The motive for the creation of incomes-policy institutions is clearly the desire to enlist the unions as a disciplinary force in the large enterprise of restabilising the post-reconstruction capitalist system, shaken as it has been by the recrudescence of militant labour struggles and an ever greater tendency towards economic crisis. The goal is the establishment of state planning commissions organised on corporatist lines and restriction of the freedom to strike. The tendency to integrate the unions in government incomes policies is explicitly supported by the Social Democratic parties, and implicitly by the Communists as well. A purely typological approach such as that employed by Eliassen produces therefore the result: 'Corporatist representation is an important strategy of all contemporary European trade unions. The number of government commissions and state offices in which the unions are represented increased steadily. In the last two decades, all European trade-union movements have tended in this direction.' (1974:76). Discussions of particular developments in individual countries will be found in the companion volume to the present work, while a comparative analysis of

changes in the role of the state is provided in the next chapter.

The attempt to subject wage negotiations to state control calls into question one of the indispensable postulates of the modern capitalist state: the separation of economics from politics in social conflicts, 'the institutionalised isolation of industrial conflicts' (Dahrendorf 1959). According to this theory of limitation of conflict, the explosive potential of the struggles between capital and labour can best be contained when the 'parties to the negotiations' are themselves allowed to regulate their affairs within an institutionalised system of bargaining which is guaranteed by the state but not subject to its control (Weitbrecht 1969). Within the unions this bifurcation is explained and encouraged by the ideological figure of the organisation's own 'political neutrality': by the assertion of a division of labour in which the union is responsible for the economic struggle, the party for the political. But this rhetorical turn is only plausible in peaceful times. As soon as economic crisis threatens the success of union struggles, and (as a further result of the crisis itself) the state attempts to influence the outcome of wage negotiations, the separation of the economic and political spheres reveals itself as the artifice it is. The unions are forced to abandon their political restraint. They must either consent to their respective government's 'stabilisation programme' – perhaps reserving the right to modify it in various ways – or they must oppose it, a choice which naturally poses the question of the articulation of a *political* alternative.<sup>2</sup> The present tendencies of state incomes policy can be considered to be representative of a whole series of similar *étatiste* activities which, undertaken in the hope of re-equilibrating the capitalist system, necessarily contribute to the politicisation of trade union action. As a further example one might consider the attempt to resolve the state's fiscal crisis by reducing budget outlays for the public sector: cost-cutting and rationalisation provoke public employees to defensive reactions. Often they are moved to participate for the first time in social struggles (nurses, teachers, etc.) A series of questions are thereby posed for all wage-earners: What is the function of the public sector? How can the division between private- and public-sector workers be overcome, and who is their common enemy?

In order to enunciate such a political position, the unions are forced to reconsider, or at least reflect upon, their relation to the political parties with which they are allied and to which they had previously delegated responsibility for formulating a political programme for the 'movement as a whole'. The unions must decide whether to accept the party's position or to counterpose a more or less dramatically independent alternative to it. It is of capital importance that the union leadership's answer to these questions will generally be quite different from the answer articulated by the cadres working in the factories. That the unions do not show a principled resistance to participation in state incomes policy derives from the policies of the political parties with which they are allied, parties which present themselves as *Ordnungsfaktoren*.

Even though the real politics of working-class organisations in Western Europe are much alike, they certainly differ concerning the degree of open

programmatic recognition of this position. In different ways, the *Verbandsideologien*<sup>3</sup> of both unions and parties adhere to goals which according to Pizzorno, taking up Tocqueville, are 'not negotiable within the rules of the system'. Workers and the union cadres in the factories attempt, on the other hand, to use the union as an instrument for the realisation of their economic claims. A restructuring of the relation between the party, the union and rank-and-file leaders and members is the result of the interplay of these factors.

## CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

### CONFLICTS OVER THE POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF UNIONS

A consequence of these dialectics of politicisation is the extreme difficulty of separating the political from the economic components of social conflicts. Economic struggles may well express a still unformed political consciousness which can articulate itself in no other way. Even if the demands are 'originally' economic in content, political changes are likely to be seen as the precondition for the satisfaction of material claims. Against this background, the conflicts between national leadership of the union and plant-level militants and leaders which arise within the larger framework of the strained relation between union and party result from a fundamental contradiction: the top union leaderships seek to retain their power position, based on monopolising control of the class in the mediation of the conflict between capital and labour. The union rank and file, on the other hand, tend to take on an immediate confrontation with employers and state. The central union leaderships' power is in danger from both angles: the governments' integration attempts through incomes policies threaten to make them lose their functions as representatives of the wage earners; while the plant-level rank and file jeopardise their ability to control. In this conflict, the union leaderships try to defend in principle the right to strike and thus their ability to take action against government restrictions. At the same time they attempt to inhibit any union struggles that might disturb their mediation function in the framework of co-operative politics. This contradictory position of the union leadership explains its contradictory politics: in part restraining and slowing down, in part tolerating and protecting workers' action. The interventions of the apparatus, however, tend to lead it to decide in favour of the party affiliation and of the relationship with government institutions.

This general argument is modified by the specific historical development and constellations in the respective countries. Union memberships differ greatly in the degree of activity and politicisation. Frequently, the shop-floor leadership is crucial in initiating labour action. Also, the contradiction within the politics of central leaderships is sometimes represented in deep cleavages within the apparatus, e.g. in Great Britain. Some aspects of intra-organisational conflict will now be analysed in more detail.

*The question of the strike as a political weapon:* In the course of various major strike waves, large numbers of strikers have articulated clear political demands in addition to the more traditional economic ones. The best example is May 1968 in France: the call for de Gaulle's resignation (Birchall and Cliff 1968; Barjonet 1968; Albers *et al.* 1974). Other strikes have in fact contributed decisively to the fall of a government (the miners' strike in 1974 in Britain). It is the political dimension of the large strike waves which the unions and their allied parties fear above all, since it places in jeopardy their capacity to control or modify the dynamics of social struggle. To avoid or reduce this danger they adopt combinations of the following tactics:

- obstruction or restriction of the strikes;
- restriction of strike demands to some economic core;
- particularly in France and Italy: organisation of short (usually one-day) national demonstrations which are ostensibly meant to give expression to the political content of the strikes but which in general serve only to buttress the parliamentary activity of the political party;
- particularly in West Germany: organisation of 'aseptic' strikes, that is of (usually industry-wide but regionally limited) work stoppages conceived and executed under the strict supervision of the national leadership.

Where political and economic struggles are led at the same time (as in West Germany during the 1966/67 recession and the campaign against the emergency laws, or in Great Britain against the Industrial Relations Bill) the union apparatuses watch that the division of labour with the party will not be destroyed by merging the two realms.

It is against the backdrop of this panoply of tactics, and the politics of restraint and moderation from which it derives, that the hard-fought plant-level strikes in some of the countries have to be understood. The struggles are not generalised, but the cadres try to pose the question of political power at the level of the plant (The best-known example was the struggle of the Lip workers (Morawo 1974)). The most diverse plant struggles have peaked in some form of the question: who in the plant is to have the final say over the production process? Even though this can be resolved in labour's favour only when the struggle can be generalised, its very formulation (whether in words or in action) is evidence of a politicisation of the battle. Therefore the national leadership attempts to blunt these struggles also by: isolating individual strikes as much as possible; and/or contributing to their disaggregation and disintegration (the tactic of the *grèves tournantes* for instance has been used by the CGT to weaken rather than strengthen actions at various times (Bois, 1964)).

The policy of the unions' national leadership can be summarised as the attempt to reduce each struggle to a limited catalogue of economic demands. In those cases where the plant-level cadres are able to turn the economic demands into arguments for renewed or continued militancy the national

leadership's responses are to create a series of safety valves through which militancy then dissipates itself.

*The struggle for political control of the organisation's structures:* Attempts to counter the political control of the parties over the unions and the labour struggle, and to establish instead the political control of the rank and file over the movement as a whole, have taken the following forms:

demand for the separation of political and trade union offices, and the introduction of the right to recall elected representatives (*imperatives Mandat*);

the efforts to fuse existing multiple unions into single, industry-wide organisations which could then serve as the framework within which a union strategy independent of the political parties could be devised. The co-operation of Communist and Socialist unions in strike committees is an example. And in Italy there is the movement for *unità sindacale* (Zoll 1975); intensified activities of the union cadre in the basic organisations of the traditional parties (reactivation of factory cells and groups, political campaign work);

the formation of political factions in the unions;

the constitution of union committees for unity of action (for example, the shop-steward defence committee and the *comitato unitario di base*), whose purpose is to exert pressure on the union's national leadership as well as on labour's social opponents.

Such initiatives are in part overtly resisted by the union's central organs, which make use of such sanctions as exclusion from union office or from the union itself; but in part they are also officially sanctioned and encouraged with the aim of diverting the militants from their original purpose, in the following ways:

the movement towards the organic fusion of existing unions into a single organisation may become an agreement by the national leaderships of the various unions to bind themselves to some 'unity of action' pact conceived as the counterpart and subordinated to a coalition between working-class and bourgeois-based political parties. The Italian case is the most striking, but in the German DGB the necessity of preserving a 'coalition' inside the union between SPD and CDU has frequently become the argument for refusing to define a clear political line (Agartz 1971);

factory cells and groups are reactivated only to the extent that they can serve as the long arm of the party in the plant;

the increased activity of workers or union cadres inside the political party is countered by institutionalising this activity in special, easily controllable worker sections (in West Germany, the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Arbeitnehmerfragen* in the SPD). A certain number of activists can be co-opted by the offer of an office or a mandate.

Whether the rank and file's initiatives prevail against the counter-measures of the central apparatus depends on the relation of forces created during the ascending phase of the periodic labour struggles.

*The debate over the political programme:* It is extremely difficult for militant workers and union cadres to work out a programmatic alternative to the state's policies, especially in so far as these are supported by the traditional workers' parties. In order to succeed at this task it is necessary to draw conclusions from long years of experience in the labour movement. For it is only out of this experience that new perspectives can be won. And it is for the same reason that, until now, the militants have been able to challenge the collaborationist policies of the party and union leadership with no more than partial and 'pragmatic' alternatives of their own. On the one hand, the militant rank-and-file attempt to preserve such freedom of action as they possess on the local level by 'playing down' the political dimension of plant and union struggles. This leads to the seemingly paradoxical circumstance that the strikers become progressively more politically conscious but simultaneously refuse to conduct the strike down an overtly political line (see the survey material on the September 1969 strikes in Germany (Schumann *et al.* 1971; IMSF 1969). The militant rank and file perceived themselves as too weak to dare a confrontation on explicitly political matters. A similar tactic is the attempt to fashion the union into a substitute or proto-party. The unions would no longer restrict themselves to economic questions but rather announce and pursue an independent political line as well. A less ambitious version of this project calls for the unions to function merely as a political pressure group in parliament and with respect to the parties.

In contrast to these proposals stands the plan to proceed from plant and union struggles to the 'conquest' of the party. The goal would be to force the party to adopt the rank and file's demands. Included among such demands are often the following: creation or expansion of the (above all judicial) 'spaces' in which workers in the plants and the unions can engage in labour struggles without fear of state regulation (the rejection or abrogation of proposed or existing anti-strike laws and of the restraining mechanism of state economic planning would find an important place under this heading); seizure of certain rights of control in the factories; state measures against factory closures; improvements in living conditions and the education system.

The union leadership responds to these tendencies by, first, accepting at face value the rank and file's reluctance to engage in explicit political activity and turning this reserve into a reason for formally distancing the union from the party. At the same time the leadership tacitly supports the party by working to moderate economic demands. Second, it abstracts from those concrete demands which the party did (under duress) have to adopt from the militant basis, and recoins them as parts of a reform programme so global that the party's victories and defeats, compromises and evasions are all but impossible to assess. Examples here are the programmes of structural reform in Italy (Trentin 1968), *Mitbestimmung* (Deppe *et al.* 1968) and *autogestion* as means of piecemeal change.

The 'new militancy' of the rank and file in the plants has manifested itself on all the levels discussed above in conflicts with the union apparatus. This sets limits to the efforts to integrate the unions in state incomes policy. Rather, the unions are sometimes pushed into a new position of strength, from which they are facing the state as *political* negotiators independent of or at least at some distance from the parties of their affiliation, even if these are in government. In Britain and Italy, this development is most advanced. In Britain, the unions' political commitment has been concentrated on repudiating the Industrial Relations Bill, i.e. saving the 'classical' leeway for wage bargaining without government interference. But when the TUC started publishing, since 1967, annual programmes of economic policy of their own as alternatives to government policies, they entered a new field as subsequent developments have shown (see the chapter by C. J. Crouch in Volume 1). Since 1972 Labour and the unions have agreed on a concrete political programme of government that was to take shape as the Social Contract of 1974. Voluntary wage restraint is made dependent on measures of welfare and economic policy.

In Italy, this developed even further. The unions not only shaped a programme of concrete reforms in social welfare and economic policy, but tried to put them through without party interference, by direct negotiations with the Government. It is particularly significant that the Italian unions utilised the strike weapon for their political demands. Nevertheless, union-government negotiations are highly 'technical' (Pizzorno 1971) in character. Results have been modest. Since 1970, this strategy of reforms is in jeopardy from two sides. Within the unions themselves, the metal workers' union FIM has turned against the bureaucratic-centralist form of the strategy, on the grounds that choosing this way means to give up the very aim of basic changes in social structure. From the other side, the Communist Party insists on the leading role of the party and the autonomy of parliament in putting through reforms! In the particular situation of Italy, what is probably decisive is that the political parliamentary sphere is blocked. As long as the working-class parties were unable to develop a common initiative of reform politics, the union stepped into the vacuum. However, as soon as the *compromesso storico*, with its elements of reform politics, was launched, the unions began to reduce their activities at this level.

To the extent that reform politics have been advanced by unions in various countries we can generalise what Pizzorno states of the Italian situation: 'The struggle for reforms . . . is utilised by the trade-union centres to re-establish their leading positions within the organisations' (1971: 138). In a situation when in the field of wage struggles the confrontation with state power and the parties linked to it was a threat, the unions restrained themselves, and initiatives moved back to the plant level. Then, negotiating reforms seemed to offer the central union apparatuses a means of regaining control of the organisations; political reforms lend themselves easily to centralised negotiations. The government usually pays at least lip service to its readiness to start initiatives in this field. However, both the Italian and the British

example give evidence of how small a leeway there is for concessions on the part of the system.

## CHANGES IN WORKING-CLASS BASED PARTIES

We have some evidence that an overall climate of economic and political mobilisation has in certain periods increased the working-class electoral basis of the traditional Social Democratic and Communist mass parties.<sup>4</sup> Paradoxically, they have profited from the 'new militancy' at the very moment when their politics turned less working-class and their main efforts were out to win 'middle-class' support. If there is a general trend in this direction, it means on the one hand that part of the 'new militancy' spreads to the parties. But on the other hand, given the class-compromise orientation of these parties,<sup>5</sup> the unions will bear more of the burden of working-class politics, endangering the entrenched division of labour between unions and parties.

Considering membership and activists of the working-class-based parties, the radicalisation of labour struggles has led to controversies and differentiations within them, beyond the immediate influence of unionists and/or militant workers. Party activists seem to be drawn ever more from middle-class, white-collar groups, and the public services, while industrial workers are less active. The militancy of these groups has reached that of the core working class at some points, but it is not really comparable to it. It has strengthened opposition currents (including a 'liberal' opposition such as the Garaudy group in the PCF). In most cases these currents have grown independent from working-class, i.e. union, influence in these parties.

## THE ROLE OF THE 'NEW STRATA' OF THE WORKING CLASS

The skilled workers are the bulk of the working-class members and activists of the reformist mass parties. The rising significance of the 'new strata' (unskilled workers, immigrants, women and youths) has not yet manifested itself in the parties, not even to the degree it has in the unions. Nor has it found an alternative 'political' expression, perhaps with the exception of Italy where the left-radical groups have some appeal to the unskilled 'mass workers'. Nevertheless, these groups have an impact on electoral strategies (because they may be decisive in electoral turnout) and on party-union relationships. This is because the unions have to take up some of their demands and forms of action which are more radical than those of the traditional working class.

Under multiple unionism, it seems that the Communist-affiliated unions have the bulk of the 'mass workers' both in France and Italy, and the deconfessionalising Catholic unions are more heavily composed of skilled, service and white-collar workers. Nevertheless, the latter unions seem to be more responsive to the unskilled sections, because their political affiliation is less rigid, and they are therefore more responsive to changes in the structure of demands and actions.

In the unitary Social Democratic union movements of Britain and West

Germany, the 'new strata' have had an impact at the plant level (shop stewards, *Betriebsräte*, *Vertrauensleute*), but hardly on the politics of the union leaderships (Müller-Jentsch, 1974), except to the extent that these are increasingly forced to step up demands for relatively higher pay rises for the 'low paid' (e.g. in Britain). But this entire field is notoriously neglected in all the countries concerned.

## THE EFFECTS OF DIFFERENT POLITICAL TRADITIONS

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COUNTRIES WITH SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC AND COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

None of the unions is unambiguously opposed to capitalist *planification* of the economy and the planning of rates of wage increases which is its logical concomitant; the tendency is rather towards a growing willingness to co-operate with such projects. Whether the participation of the leadership of the unions' national organisation in the incomes policy is openly proclaimed or not; whether participation is conditional upon more or less far-reaching revisions of the state's policy; whether the government's statistics and projections are uncritically accepted – the answer to those and similar questions depends upon the particular historical relation between party and union and the diverging political traditions of each country. One might distinguish the following varieties of union response:

The position of unitary unionism under Social Democratic leadership (TUC in England, DGB in West Germany): open announcement of the willingness to participate in economic and incomes planning, coupled with the dogged insistence that formal negotiating autonomy be guaranteed; acceptance of the state's wage guidelines is dependent on Social Democrats' (Labour) participation in the government.

The position of the Communist-led unions (the prime example here is the CGT): official rejection of 'participatory' models and continued defence of some theory of the class struggles, coupled with simultaneous participation in state planning commissions. Further characteristics of this form of uneasy co-operation are meeting with national employers' associations around the proverbial bargaining table. Such negotiating sessions tend to be held under government auspices and are meant, under certain conditions, to put an end to a particular wave of significant strikes. The political complement to this *Ordnungsfaktor* policy is the recognition of a *programme commun* (in Italy *compromesso storico*) whose purpose in turn is to create confidence in a series of reforms which themselves conserve the fundamental structures of the capitalist system. Especially at election time, this acknowledgement of an overarching political programme of the connected party tends to restrain wage demands.

The principal cause of the Communist unions' comparatively greater reluctance to participate in economic planning is the fact that since the 1950s the Communists have been excluded from national governments. Despite the Communists' declared intent to respect the institutions of the present state, they have been barred from governmental responsibilities with a vehemence quite different from that brought to bear against the Social Democrats. The explanation for this is to be found in the not unreasonable fear that the leadership of the traditional worker's parties may itself be unable to control the flood of militant expectations loosed by its very entry into government. In France and Italy, where the Communist parties, who see themselves in the tradition of the Russian revolution, are the most powerful force in the labour movement, and where the history of this movement is one of armed struggle (especially the resistance movements against fascism), the danger is particularly great. Also, the Communist mass parties are in spite of all their vicissitudes, very considerably more strongly present at the plant level than are their Social Democratic counterparts. The balance of power between unions and party can easily be challenged. In general the parties dominate the unions in the way described, bending them to the exigencies of the planned economy. But the ever old, ever new, 'new militancy' in the factories and unions periodically calls these arrangements into question.

Unfortunately, we cannot here give full consideration to the relationships between Christian and formerly Christian unions and their parties. Most important is the role of these unions in France and Italy, where CFDT and CISL have entered a process of deconfessionalisation. On the level of programmes, they have moved from the social doctrines of Catholicism (including some elements of business unionism as imported by the AFL-CIO) to various currents of reformism and loose associations with the Socialist parties. In certain periods, the CFDT has even announced a more radical position than the CGT. In any case, these unions have been less dogmatic in programmes and less bureaucratic in structure than their Communist counterpoints. This has allowed working-class militants in many cases to utilise them as organisational levers (see below, p. 192), mainly at enterprise level.

#### DIFFERENCES IN ORGANISATIONAL LINKS BETWEEN PARTIES AND UNIONS: SINGLE VERSUS MULTIPLE UNIONISM

The relationships between parties and unions have been most thoroughly explored for the British case. For the politically committed unions of France and Italy, most of the literature stresses the tendency towards more political independence from the parties (e.g., Pillon 1972: 103; Zoll 1975; Dubois *et al.* in Volume 1). It is only the CGT that retains the theory of 'transmission-belt' unionism. Formally unaffiliated labour unions, however, are also linked to political parties. For West Germany Deppe and Herding (1974) have analysed the relationship between independence and even 'neutrality' of the labour unions and their political affiliation. It is common to both unitary and

multiple unionism that today any union action will have electoral consequences. Whether these work favourably or adversely to the working-class-based parties depends mainly on two questions (though the crucial issue of the relationship between voting behaviour and industrial action is much in need of thorough research):

First, have the parties supported or 'sold out' workers' actions? The French Communist Party lost the elections that followed the general strike of May 1968, after a 'sell-out policy'; while the British Labour Party's support of the miners' strike in 1974 contributed to its election victory.

Second, is a given working-class initiative capable of impressing the 'middle classes' for whose votes there is traditionally the main competition between Conservative and working-class-based parties?

Besides the realm of elections, we must look at changes in the relationship between unions and parties at the plant level. Otherwise the question of the unions' dependence on or independence from the parties cannot be properly analysed, and we would miss a principal feature of the 'new militancy', the revival of working-class action *at the shop floor*. This has been most influential in Britain. Research on the plant-level roots of working-class politics is extremely scarce.

*Unitary Unionism under Social-Democratic Leadership:* In Britain and West Germany, similar patterns have developed. The TUC unions have not been 'running' the Parliamentary Labour Party or the Labour Government. The first and second Wilson Governments took an open stand against crucial strikes by TUC unions, which is also true for the second Brandt government in West Germany. Organisational and financial dependence does not mean political subordination: unions command dues, but not electoral votes (Butler and Stokes 1971: 203), and the parties might even risk losing working-class votes in fighting the unions in order to try to win middle-class support (Minkin 1974: 36). Programmes and political declarations have been 'modernised' first and mainly by the parties, while the unions kept part of their 'traditional' ideology to retain the loyalties of traditional rank-and-file militants. On the top level, union officers take party offices more directly in England than in Germany. In the rank and file, party affiliation means little in normal times, no matter whether membership is collective (England) or individual (Germany). The parties keep the loyalties of their core working-class partisans through the unions' apparatuses, not by their own political involvement with the rank and file in the factory. ('The union is the organisation of the party in the factory' (Pizzorno, verbal communication).) It seems, however, that recently in both countries the Social Democratic parties are more involved on the level of shop stewards, *Vertrauensleute*, *Betriebsräte* and factory militants. The conditions for intra-union political opposition are clearly different in the two countries. In the post-war period West German unions became anti-Communist coalitions of Social Democrats

and a small minority of Christian Democrats, and even now partisans of the particularly moderate DKP are not safe. In Britain the collective political affiliation allows the CP to exert limited pressure within the bureaucracy. It also claims some of the central figures in rank-and-file militancy. Even to the non-reformist left there is but little administrative threat.

*Multiple Unionism with Strong Communist Unions.* In France and Italy, the relationship between CGT and CGIL and their parties has always been closer than that of the other unions (old CFDT, now CFTC; FO; CISL; UIL) to the Catholic or other parties. However, the unity of action in the French general strike of 1968 and in the struggles of 1969/70 in Italy has led to a loosening of ties to the Communist Parties. In Italy organisational unity is under way, and the Metalworkers have virtually achieved it (Zoll 1974; Lama 1971). For political intra-union opposition, there is certainly a difference between the CGT and CGIL as the PCI is less closed to political factionalism. More important is that the French and Italian Parties have cores of working-class militants. In Italy and France CP factory activity almost ceased to exist in the 1950s, but its roots and weight are still superior to Labour and the SPD, whose factory groups have no decisive status. Radical intra-union opposition has developed most intensely in the unions outside the control of the highly bureaucratised CP leaderships, i.e. in CFDT, FO, and CISL, for if the various groups of the non-reformist left try to gain strength in the largest mass unions (CGT and CGIL) they meet repressive measures. Another characteristic of independence in multiple unionism are clauses of incompatibility of political and union offices (Koppel 1972; Zoll 1975; Dubois, Chapter 1 above). These clauses prohibit simultaneous office-holding in union and party (or government) at the top level. But this does not seriously separate the organisations, for just as in unitary unionism, informal arrangements prevail. However, in multiple unionism, the Socialist and Communist parties carry loyalty to the unions as well as the other way round.

One of the main strengths of the deconfessionalising Christian unions in comparison with CGT and CGIL has often been struggles at the enterprise level. The CFDT has changed to a kind of syndical position (Reynaud 1975) which at least expressed this strength, of which the occupation of Lip is an outstanding example. Most of this is likewise true for the CISL. Even though critics have linked this to remainders of corporatist and/or business-unionist ideologies, these unions do take up some of the plant-centered militancy of the rank-and-file.

*Multiple Unionism with Strong Christian Unions:* We treat multiple political unionism in Belgium and the Netherlands as a different case, because of the great impact of religious segmentation (*verzuijing*). As in France and Italy, a deconfessionalisation process goes on within the Christian (i.e. mainly Catholic) trade unions, but far weaker. It differs from those countries in that the Christian unions do not compete with CP-affiliated bodies, but with Social Democratic unions. The separation is not the result of the Cold War but of the survival of Catholic workers' movements after 1945. The unions are

not affiliated to long-term opposition parties but to parties participating in many national governments. In both countries, unions of different political affiliations compete at the level of demands and strike activity. Some of the militancy at the plant level in both countries uses the Christian rather than the Social-Democratic unions, just as in France and Italy at a higher level.

Some political opposition profits from the political definition of the Social Democratic unions, particularly in Belgium, which is a common feature of multiple, politically committed unionism. Belgium is the strongest case for the necessity to refer to *regional* differences (between Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels) as well when discussing the splits and factions of the working class in order to explain its politics. Generally, the research available on the social background (by regions, skill, sex) of multiple unionism is insufficient.

#### DIFFERENCES IN THE STRENGTH AND KIND OF POLITICAL TRADITIONS LEFT OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND COMMUNIST MASS PARTIES

We suggest that the degree of political radicalisation through the unions and of the rejection of the barriers between political and economic struggle is in part explained by the strength and kind of those political currents in the working class which represent a left (left radical, left communist, anarchist or revolutionary syndicalist) criticism of the mass working-class-based parties. 'Pure' trade unionism as it was advanced by most of the centralised trade union organisations that were founded between 1868 (England) and 1898 (Belgium) went along first, with the destruction of revolutionary-syndicalist and anarcho-syndicalist traditions which did not accept the organisational dualism between party and union; and second, with the growing political influence of the trade union leadership in the Social Democratic parties.

In Britain, West Germany and the Netherlands the syndicalist tradition has been considerably weaker than in Belgium, France, and Italy. In Belgium, the Wallonian general strike of 1960/61 against the government was strongly influenced by the Renard faction which later formed its own political party (cf. M. Molitor in Volume 1). In France, the CFDT went through a 'Proudhonian' phase (Dubois *et al.* 1974) (equalitarian demands, non-cooperation with parties and the state, *autogestion*) which was influenced by the political left opposition to the CP (though in the old CGT the revolutionary syndicalists had a large faction before the Second World War). In Italy, syndicalism had never been as strong as in France, but after 1968 'pansyndicalism' was influential in both CGIL and CISL. This concept called for a universalist social programme by the trade unions and meant a left-wing criticism of CGIL politics at the same time. The left radical groups and *Il Manifesto* expressed some of this criticism in a different way. In Britain and West Germany, the Social Democratic mass parties find a half-hearted CP opposition that in a way protects their flanks against left-wing criticism. Britain's CP differs from its West German counterpart, however, in the bold behaviour of its factory and union militants. The Trotskyist groups that exist

in Britain cannot start from a tradition of revolutionary mass organisation. They emphasise, paradoxically, an aspect in the tradition of British and North American unionism that is usually considered conservative rather than radical: 'voluntarism', i.e. the refusal to make unions dependent on any political frameworks. In the fight against the Industrial Relations Bill, this tradition of 'voluntarism' has shown its strength as a radicalising factor.

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION: ECONOMIC CRISIS AND POLITICAL RADICALISATION

Our first purpose in this paper has been to show that the objective conditions under which a separation of economic and political struggle, a firmly entrenched division of labour between parties and unions, could survive, are things of the past. In the form of state planning and incomes bargaining in order to ensure further accumulation under difficult conditions of valorisation of capital on the one hand, and the 'fiscal crisis of the state' (O'Connor 1973) on the other, the two spheres are merging. The unions have increasingly tended to co-operate with these policies, but at the same time they legitimate this attitude by programmes to bring about long-term social reforms: given all the differences between social contract, *programme commun*, *compromesso storico*, *Konzertierte Aktion*, etc., they have this element in common. There is at first a 'natural' resistance by the rank and file, who can still rely on a union apparatus anxious to retain the capacity to strike and to keep their membership's loyalty. This first step is fairly well documented in what has been written on Western European labour struggles (Albers *et al.* 1974; Kassalow 1974; Spitaels 1967).

Our second purpose was to analyse the process by which the subjective consciousness and collective behaviour of the working class attains a unified perspective of political and economic struggle. We have tried to show the 'dialectic of politicisation' which in many cases consists in a rejection of an open profession of politics, but which may sometimes appear in political counter-programmes. It may well manifest itself in a mobilisation and activation of the traditional working-class-based parties, but no less clearly in the formation of new, critical currents or political activation of the union rather than the party. We have suggested that when the 'submerged' strata of the working class become active, excluded as they are from effective participation in the organisation, they do not respect the separation of economic and political struggle. Finally, we have pointed to the different traditions of left-wing currents critical of the traditional parties. These currents contribute to changes within the unions and parties themselves; they produce more effects than just an opposition from outside. On the entire subject, there exists hardly any comparative or cross-national study of Western Europe. Some aspects, such as the impact of 'new strata' and of political intra-union opposition, are poorly researched even on a national scale. And on others, such as voting trends, internal union democracy and the

TABLE 7.1 *Parties' electoral support in Western European countries*

<i>Country</i>	<i>Date of last election</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Share of poll (%)</i>
Belgium	March 1974	CSP	32.34
		BSP	26.66
		Freedom and Progress Party	15.20
		(Rassemblement Wallonie et al	10.94)
		Volks Unie	
		C.P. and Democratic Union	3.16
France	March 1973 (first ballot)	Others	1.50
		UDR	23.9
		PCF	21.4
		PSF	19.2
		Mouvement Reformateur	12.5
		FNRI	7.0
		Centre pour Démocratie et Progrès	3.7
		PSU <i>et al.</i>	3.3
		Other majority parties	3.3
		Various rightist parties	2.9
		Other leftist parties	2.8
Italy	June 1976	DC	38.7
		PCI	34.4
		PSI	9.6
		MSI	6.1
		PSDI	3.4
		PRI	3.1
		DP	1.5
		PLI	1.3
		RP	1.1
		SVP	0.5
		Others	0.3
Netherlands	November 1972	PvdA	27.4
		KVP	17.7
		VVD	14.4
		ARP	8.8
		PPR	4.8
		CHU	4.8
		CPN	4.5
		D'66	4.2
		DS '70	4.1
		SGP	2.2
		BP	1.9
		GPV	1.8
		PSP	1.5
		RKPN	0.9
United Kingdom*	October 1974	Labour	39.3 (319)
		Conservative	35.8 (276)
		Liberal	18.3 (13)

TABLE 7.1 (Continued)

Country	Date of last election	Party	Share of poll (%)
West Germany	November 1972	Scottish Nationalist Party	2.9 (11)
		Plaid Cymru	0.6 (3)
		Communist	(—)
		UUUC	(10)
		SDLP	3.1 (1)
		Independent Labour	(1)
		Other (Speaker)	(1)
		SPD	45.8
		CDU/CSU	44.9
		FDP	8.4
		NPD	0.6
		DKP	0.3
		Others	0.1

\* It must be remembered that there is no system of proportional representation in the UK, elections being based solely on territorial constituencies and the rule of 'first past the post'. This affects voters' choice in certain areas and also the decisions of parties whether to contest particular seats. The numbers of Parliamentary seats gained by the parties are shown in brackets.

Source: *European Yearbook 1976* (London: Europa), updated.

political 'culture' or consciousness of the working class, there is even a lack of readily available and systematic factual materials. This paper can of course represent no more than a tiny sketch of the task. Extensive comparative research is needed.

The view which we wish to contribute to the analysis is that unions and parties as organisational units should not be regarded as the actors in the political process of the 'new militancy'. The real actor has been the working-class rank-and-file in the different countries. Their politics has determined, however diffusely, the changes and differences of the organisations.

#### NOTES

1. Throughout this paper, we are using the term 'co-operative' to refer to a union policy which, briefly, restricts itself *explicitly* in pursuing workers' interests. Beyond this assessment, however, the authors differ in the characterisation of the tendency to integrate unions in incomes-policy institutions.

R. Herding terms it an institutionalisation of *co-operative* structures in the relationship between unions, employers, and the state. Explicit restraint in wage policy by the unions is the characteristic of co-operative policies. *Corporatistic* policies would go beyond this and waive effectively the right to strike.

D. Hoss would call *co-operative* the traditional voluntary self-restraint of the unions in wage policy to maintain 'social peace'. The transition to an institutionalised integration of the unions into government incomes policies constitutes a new aspect, and is the basis of the

evolution of *corporatistic* structures, with the tendency to do away completely with union autonomy.

2. The dialectics of politicisation are described in an exemplary way for the case of the West German system of wage negotiations in Hoss 1974.
3. This term means programmes and principles which no longer express strategic goals actually pursued but nevertheless are kept in order to maintain membership loyalties (Bergmann, Jacobi and Muller-Jentsch 1975: 139 ff).
4. The West German case is documented in Herding 1975. For Britain, we conclude from Butler and Stokes (1971:149); Butler and Kavanagh (1975), and opinion poll data that workers do concentrate votes on Labour but that this trend has been diminished (though not reversed) in recent years by the rise of regional autonomist parties. In France, according to Reynaud (1975: 222) the class loyalty pattern seems to have remained stable from 1970 to 1973, but this information is very incomplete. For Italy, the 1975 elections revealed a massive swing of working-class votes to the Communist Party. Dutch workers turn increasingly to the PvdA (communication with T. Akkermans). In Belgium, regional developments blur the lines of political alignment by social class (Lorwin 1975: 254).
5. Recent examples are the *programme commun* in France and the *compromesso storico* in Italy, though the former involves far less co-operation with the bourgeoisie than the latter.
6. This status of permanent opposition did not, however, preclude the Communist parties and their unions from sometimes playing a crucial role in supporting governments of bourgeois parties. The most striking case is that of de Gaulle's government, whose stability over ten years was essentially based on factual support by the PCF on the grounds of its anti-American foreign policy. But the PCI has also supported bourgeois governments of the DC and *centro-sinistra* in the 1950s as well as in the 1960s on a variety of questions of domestic politics.

# 8 *The Changing Role of the State in Industrial Relations in Western Europe*

COLIN CROUCH

The central purpose of this paper is to account for and interpret the major changes which have been taking place in relations between the state, trade unions and (to a lesser extent) employers during the period and in the countries covered by this study. The first step will be briefly to establish a simple conceptual framework which will assist this task of analysis. Next, since the immediate post-war period was an important formative one for industrial relations institutions its main features and subsequent changes will be sketched on a country-by-country basis. Against that background it will then be possible to examine the direction of changes which have taken place in each country since the late 1960s. Finally an attempt will be made to reach some general conclusions.

Several authors have claimed that a model of corporatism is of value in interpreting contemporary developments in this area, and extensive use will be made of the concept here. In so doing it is necessary to distinguish between three uses frequently made of it: (1) the rise of organised groups, as opposed to individuals, as the main units of civil society to which the state relates; (2) the organisation of workers on a sectional basis, cutting across wider solidarities of class, and seeking collaborative agreements with employers; (3) the hierarchical, non-conflictual integration of the state and organised groups representative of both capital and labour, replacing individualism as in version (1).

While each usage has support in some literature, it is the third which is adopted here. It captures the authentic significance of the term as it developed in its initial historical context as a doctrine of the European right in opposition both to the individualism and atomisation of *laissez faire* 'liberal' capitalism and to the conflictual collectivism of workers represented by socialism. Conservatives asserted the need for the group nature of social life to be recognised, but with these groups harmoniously bound together in a vertical structure reproducing the major class divisions of society and with the state at the centre (though some versions, for example that of Durkheim, tended to ignore the state). Drawing heavily on Romantic conceptions of the nature of medieval guild society, the corporatists envisaged the integration of

society being based on moral unity and the use of such doctrines of Catholic social thought as the 'just wage' and 'one's station and its duties'. It is the essential unreality of this basis of integration in an industrial and increasingly secular society which has limited the practical relevance of corporatism as a political ideology. It is notable that the major historical instances in which it has been explicitly avowed as a doctrine – the fascist or quasi-fascist regimes of pre-war Germany and Italy; Spain and Portugal until very recently; and from time to time in some Latin-American countries – have in practice relied on massive physical coercion to ensure unity. However, in a curious way certain features of corporatist doctrine make it relevant to several of the problems of a distinctly modern capitalism – which can no longer rely on mere market pressures to secure the subordination of labour; in which the state is constantly and actively involved; and in which both labour and capital increasingly relate to each other and to the state through organisations (for more detailed discussions see Crouch 1977; Harris 1972; Winkler 1976).

Corporatist relations may be readily distinguished from a situation of pure conflict. Here, the different parties have no interest in reaching any ongoing consensus. They see their relations entirely in zero-sum terms and each seeks constantly to weaken and destroy the antagonist. Any cessation in conflict is treated as a temporary truce and any concession as a gain won in the struggle, not the basis of a constructive, mutually beneficial relationship. Such a situation is likely to be as unrealisable in practice as pure corporatism. It is dependent on there being no issues over which the parties may reach agreements which are in at least the short-term interest of all concerned; in practice industrial relations is full of such issues. It also assumes that those actively engaged on all sides are prepared continuously to seek conflict and opposition; since this involves major disruption to the productive system and hence to the means of subsistence, it is only at exceptional periods of crisis that any group will adopt such a course – with the exception perhaps of those who are so powerless that their continuing disruption fails to have any major impact on the economic system. Finally, as the theorists of institutionalised conflict have argued, even the most limited kind of truce, accommodation or exchange of concessions contains the basis of reciprocity and interchange implying a modicum of trust and mutually agreed rules (Coser 1956; Simmel 1955; Dahrendorf 1959: ch. VI). In particular, where the parties are represented in the conflict by organisations, those bodies, in making even a limited truce agreement, accept some obligation to secure maintenance of the truce among their own members; if they are unable to do this, they are unable to offer anything to the antagonist in exchange for concessions.

Corporatist relations are unlikely to persist indefinitely without consensus and hierarchy being supported by the granting of material concessions; pure conflict is unlikely to persist without agreements on an exchange of terms. This is not to say that all patterns of industrial relations are in the last analysis the same; however unreal the extremes are, there are many intermediate positions on the continuum stretching between them, and it is possible to identify the kinds of factors which will predispose a given situation towards a

certain position on that continuum. Specific examples of such factors will be encountered in subsequent pages, but it is possible here to give some indication of the general points involved. For example, do the issues at stake in conflict permit of a solution from which all benefit, or are they win-or-lose situations? To what extent are subordinates prepared to accept the ideology of dominant interests? How far are the organisations representing the parties, especially subordinate interests, able to control their members in order to make continuing agreements? In contrast, are they too weak to make deals with them worth while?

The scope of the system for making material concessions to subordinate demands occupies an ambivalent position in such list. On the one hand it marks a movement away from corporatism; it does not, strictly speaking, constitute consensus,<sup>1</sup> and the notion of 'trading' deal for deal with subordinates constitutes a breach with hierarchy. At the same time, however, conflicts in which material concessions may frequently be won are likely to cease being pure conflicts and become continuing exchanges. In other words, the existence of wide scope for material concessions is a force likely to keep a system of industrial relations firmly in the middle ground between corporatism and outright conflict.

This whole central terrain that makes up the continuum between the two poles constitutes the arena of collective bargaining; an activity which always contains within it, but in differing proportions, a corporatist and a conflictual element, as the above discussion has shown. Since collective bargaining is the single most prevalent aspect of post-war industrial relations systems in advanced capitalist societies, it is important to recognise its own heterogeneity and its relationship to the other concepts under discussion. In discussing changes in bargaining patterns we shall now be able to indicate to what extent they have or have not been in a corporatist direction.

## THE POST-WAR SETTLEMENT AND AFTER

Ironically, the defeat in war of political systems which had at least rhetorically adopted corporatism as a system of economic organisation left the nation states of Western Europe with economies which incorporated strong elements of that system. War had itself provided the basis for genuine inter-class co-operation in several countries as part of the Resistance movement (or, in Britain, in the war effort). This was reinforced in the consensus engendered by the stark necessities of post-war reconstruction. Indicators of this consensus were the presence of Communist and left-wing socialist parties within the governments of several countries. War had also bequeathed the apparatus of a mobilised society, with producer groups actively organised and the state occupying a far more central economic role than in the pre-war (or in some cases pre-fascist) period of capitalism. The ensuing corporatism was probably not of a kind which would have pleased the nineteenth-century conservatives who originated the doctrine; the basis of the class consensus incorporated

many major concessions to the working class: free, recognised trade unions (sometimes with entrenched legal rights), extensive welfare services and the prospect of socialist parties in government. However, the overall structure of authority in employment remained; the reforms being attempted were those of a kind to make the system more acceptable rather than overturn it; and corporatist integration was in many ways more promising than a return to the use of high unemployment and harsh labour discipline, which would in any case be difficult to impose on the organised post-war working class. But major fissures appeared in this edifice very soon: the departure of the Communists from government in France and Italy in 1947 as the USA and USSR moved to render irreconcilable the economic systems which they both dominated was perhaps the clearest sign of the breach. Over the subsequent years the corporatist structures became decreasingly relevant to the maintenance of cohesion in nearly all the countries concerned. Those with large Communist labour movements were immediately removed from the arena, while in Britain, which emerged from the war with its institutions virtually intact, the extent of post-war institutional change had in any case been that much less radical.

The country in which corporatism can be most clearly identified as a powerful force for a considerable period after the war is the Netherlands. As Akkermans and Grootings show in their paper in Volume 1,<sup>2</sup> corporatism is a highly useful model to the interpretation of Dutch industrial relations. The pre-war structure had in any case been highly consensual, and this had been considerably strengthened by inter-class unity against the German Occupation. The institutions of *verzuijing* which already made possible integration of the divided structure of Dutch society provided models for collaboration, while the sheer small size of the country also needs to be considered as a factor making for concerted organisation (Barbash 1972: ch. 4).

The state, often working indirectly through its influence on bipartite institutions, set down guidelines which provided tight parameters for income growth and related issues; under the incomes policy the Board of Mediators played a strict control function, not the mediation which its name suggests (Malles 1973: 130). The unions were deeply integrated into the relevant institutions, and in the interests of national reconstruction accepted the guidelines. At the same time, union leaderships were insulated from contrary pressures from their memberships by their isolation from the work-place. While conceding the unions a place of deep involvement in the formulation of national economic policy, Dutch employers resisted strongly any penetration of the work-place (Barbash 1972: ch. 4). The elaborated structure of works councils, dominated by the employers, served the double functions of securing the exclusion of the unions from the enterprise and also of constituting in itself an example of pure corporatism: the non-conflictual organisation of workers in a hierarchical relationship with the employer. Further, the extensive legal rights granted to unions in the post-war Constitution had the effect of channelling and limiting their power as well as safeguarding it, and of further divorcing the unions' strength from dependence on the actual powers secured

at the place of work by the members.

While the establishment of corporatist institutions can be explained in terms of the factors discussed above, it is more doubtful whether one can attribute the persistence of that structure for so long solely to the continuing strength of moral cohesion. For example, the sheer facts of domination by the employer and the absence of real power led to a decline in the practical importance of the works councils (Malles 1973: 165). Two factors are probably relevant here. First, the Dutch economy expanded relatively easily, helped by its ability to attract a high degree of investment by multinational corporations. The state's active economic role did not involve making difficult and restrictive interventions, horizons were constantly expanding, and relatively little pressure needed to be exercised on the corporatist institutions. Second, at points where the constraints of the centralised wage system encountered either shop-floor resistance or tight labour markets, there were local compromises: wage drift or 'black wages', paid in defiance of the centralised policy (Barbash 1972). It was when, in the mid-1960s, pressures had begun to distort the overall operation of the incomes policy at a time when economic progress was becoming more difficult to secure that the system started to fall apart. In other words, the prosperity of the 1950s and early 1960s provided its own sources of social stability to buttress the corporatist institutions.

In a review of the industrial relations systems of the world, post-war Netherlands and West Germany would certainly be ranked together; but direct comparison between them reveals important distinctions in both the extent and type of corporatist developments. A major difference concerns the state. While the German state, always a powerful element in the maintenance of a united Germany, had grown massively during the Nazi period, after the war the country's position as a defeated power involved the dismantling of much of this apparatus and the imposition on the new West Germany of an elaborate institutional pluralism and the concept of the 'social market economy' that would appear to inhibit corporatism. These features were reflected in the absence of any detailed state economic planning, a policy of non-interference in collective bargaining, and a formal abstention by employers' associations and trade unions from political involvement. But behind these rather obvious features, the German state has retained characteristics which date back many years and imply a deep corporatism. This is mainly seen in the operation of German law, which was less subject to reform than the more overtly political institutions of government and which has a major role within industrial relations. It was the abstention of *government*, not the state as a whole, which limited the extent of corporatism here.

German law has in fact retained principles which in other countries were abolished during the early capitalist period: a corporatist as opposed to an individualist-liberal approach to organised social groups (Ramm 1972). 'Archaic' though these principles may be, they have been of value to modern German capitalism in a period when several countries have found that the control of labour is more readily achieved *by means of* rather than *through*

preventing its collectivism. Unlike English common law, German law has no difficulty in accepting the organisation of labour and hence in treating those organisations as deriving their right to exist and their detailed powers from the state. Thus the right to strike is restricted to specifically defined bodies and is not enjoyed by the individual worker or group of workers as such. Detailed restrictions limit the circumstances in which strike action may be taken (including the peace obligation or *Friedenspflicht* (Giugni 1972), the doctrine of *ultima ratio* (the strike as last resort) (Ramm 1972), and the restrictive provisions for strike ballots before a strike may be called (Schmidt, F., 1972). The doctrine of *Ordnungsfaktor*, under which unions 'share' with management the function of securing order within industry (ibid.) is clearly corporatist. Collective agreements themselves are highly legal devices, imposing enforceable obligations on both sides and being subject to resolution by law courts (Schregle 1974:3, 4). Finally, as Müller-Jentsch and Sperling discuss in their paper in the companion Volume 1, the *Betriebsräte* serve, like the Dutch works councils, both to exclude the unions from detailed involvement in the plant and to provide a collaborative form of worker organisation; though, as anticipated in the introduction to the present paper, the extent to which they do this without elements of bargaining should not be exaggerated.

The heavy legal structure has been reinforced by the voluntarily adopted policies of the unions themselves, though with different degrees of emphasis among them. From early on their central political demand was for *Mitbestimmung*, originally a radical policy in intent, and still seen as such by the employers; but most evidence of the operation of the policy suggests that it has not been used as a weapon for securing increased worker control, and can more usefully be interpreted as an element in the specifically non-conflictual form of participation favoured by the German unions. In other spheres of industrial relations this policy has been reflected in the unions' general aversion to strike and similar action, particularly from the late 1950s onwards (Hoss 1974). This strategy was facilitated by: (1) at first the commitment of union leaders to the construction of a new nation after the ravages of the war, combined with their determination to avoid both the social upheavals which had facilitated the Nazi takeover, and the inflation of the previous period; (2) the highly centralised nature of the reconstructed union movement, limiting the exposure of leaderships to rank-and-file pressure; and (3) the high rate of growth of the German economy, which has eventually made it the most dominant power within Western and Central Europe and made possible important advances in working-class living standards.

No free trade union movement can adopt a policy of pure collaboration, and the German unions have rejected state incomes policy and insisted on the 'freedom' of collective bargaining, though the limitations imposed by both law and union policy on the range of conflict within that bargaining have inclined post-war industrial relations in West Germany heavily towards the corporatist end of the spectrum, as seen in the limitation of claims to the rate of productivity growth and in the attention paid by unions to the pronouncements of the *Sachverständigenrat*. Again, however, as with the Netherlands, it is

essential to note that the strain borne by corporatist institutions was considerably reduced by the sheer prosperity of the national economy.

The situation in Belgium has shared certain characteristics of the two previous systems, but with important distinctions. As Molitor shows in his paper in Volume 1, as a result of both Resistance solidarity and employers' fear of future workers' power, post-war reconstruction saw the establishment of a wide range of institutions, mainly at national level, which incorporated the union leadership in economic policy without any radical changes in the social structure. In exchange for this high level of penetration into socio-economic institutions the unions virtually gave up the exercise of autonomous bargaining power, accepting the relation of wages to price- and skill-level criteria. They also secured a wide range of legal rights which, in the usual way, has also served to contain them. As in Germany and the Netherlands, the main impact of these devices has been to integrate the national union leaderships; it has been a relaxed corporatism that has not sought to mobilise the population as a whole in any way, while the involvement of union officers in a multitude of bodies helped insulate them from pressure from their memberships.

Two important characteristics distinguishing Belgium are, first, the relatively passive role of the state; and second, the appearance of shop-floor unofficial action relatively early in the post-war period. The first of these features stems largely from the dead-locked nature of Belgian politics caused by the continuing Flemish-Walloon conflicts. As Lorwin has argued (1975:257), the unions and employers' associations have come to play the part in society more usually performed by political parties. In particular, the national-level bipartite agreements of *programmation sociale* have often required government action, and the state's continued willingness to accept this amounts to its underwriting the private agreements of the *partenaires sociales* (ibid.: 256; Malles 1973: 88). In part this means the negotiation of working-class gains, but there is also the *quid pro quo*; while legal controls over the right to strike in Belgium have been very light (Lagasse 1965), national agreements often incorporated no-strike clauses. For a long time the Belgian state would not dare attempt an incomes policy (Lorwin 1975: 260), but the bipartite agreements produced results similar to those which such a policy would have sought.

Although the union apparatus has been deeply integrated in national institutions, autonomous shop-floor organisation began to make itself felt from an early period. The sheer high level of union membership in Belgium must have been important in this. Indeed, at the very time that the extremely centralised system of *programmation sociale* was being developed, a movement towards decentralisation was also taking place, as Molitor has described in detail. During the course of the 1960s the national agreements became increasingly unrealistic and the corporatism which they implied became a less relevant characteristic of industrial relations.

British industrial relations have frequently been described as 'liberal' in the sense that there was not only government abstention from detailed involve-

ment in collective bargaining, but also a very low level of regulation by law and little attempt (either statutorily or voluntarily) at introducing elaborated rights and principles into the relationship between employers and unions. There are important elements of historical continuity in this liberal tradition, since its origins lie in the *laissez faire* model of economic life (Kahn-Freund and Hepple 1972). But these continuities should not be exaggerated. The successful pursuit of full-employment policies from the 1940s onwards marked a major change in British industrial relations, increasing the power of workers' organisations and imparting a decisive collectivist character to its liberalism (Kahn-Freund 1959; Wedderburn 1972b).

In the immediate post-war years it might have been possible to envisage a highly corporatist evolution for the British system. Power within the unions was concentrated in the hands of a small number of union leaders anxious to pursue wage restraint to assist the new Labour Government in its programmes of post-war recovery and social reform. There was a high degree of government involvement in economic planning and, by 1948, albeit as a response to short-term crisis, the rudiments of incomes policy. Further, the Government encouraged (though notably without legislation) the formation of institutions for joint consultation within the enterprise. However, within a few years it had become clear that most of these indications of future development were misleading. An early consequence of full employment was a shift to the base in the distribution of power within at least some unions, making it less possible for union leaders to deliver effective support for wage restraint, while the return of the Conservatives in 1951 reduced the commitment of union leaders to assisting government anyway. The Tories returned gradually to an unplanned economy but with continued full employment, while placing considerable reliance on the cultivation of amicable, non-interventionist relations with the unions in an attempt to overcome the bitterness generated in the inter-war years.

An important element of corporatism survived both in this attitude of Government and in the moderation with which unions responded to the opportunities of the legal context and the shift of power to the base. Despite the absence of even a voluntary peace obligation, bargaining was generally contained by the unions themselves almost to the point of collaboration, through various tacit and implicit restraints of the kind typical of British politics in general. The activities of the state fitted this pattern. Its main form of intervention was through the conciliatory activities of the Ministry of Labour, which concentrated on helping the parties reach the agreement which they would have made voluntarily had not negotiations broken down; it did not seek to impose a Government policy. At the same time a wide range of tripartite institutions was developed, stemming largely from the wartime situation, which involved the unions in national discussions while (significantly) operating almost entirely at the level of non-controversial issues where collaboration could easily be pursued.

These elements began to be undermined as pressure from below for wage increases, manifested in a rising level of unofficial strikes, the growing

importance of shop stewards and a high degree of wage drift, became increasingly evident throughout the 1950s. To a degree this pressure was absorbed by economic growth; to some extent governments were prepared to tolerate a level of inflation as a means of providing additional room for manoeuvre; and on occasions they resorted to minor increases in the level of unemployment. However, by the early 1960s both industrial relations issues and the general problems of the British economy led the Conservative Government to embark on a new policy of intervention. The steady erosion of corporatist elements was about to be reversed.

The weakness of the union movements, the dominance within them of the Communist Party, and the weakness of the political state itself, greatly inhibited early corporatist tendencies in France and Italy. In both countries all that remained was the increasingly empty shell of participative works councils which by-passed the unions. If in the UK the unions were too strong at grass-roots level to enable the relaxed corporatism of the period to operate effectively, in these countries the unions were too weak and isolated for it to be either possible or necessary for the state to use them as instruments of national cohesion. For some years the Catholic unions were a potentially collaborative influence, but their minority status (within a total unionised work force which was itself a minority) and their need to compete for workers' loyalty with Communist and other confederations lessened the significance of this.

In Italy the weakness of the unions was compounded by high unemployment and sheer physical coercion which had been directed against CGIL members in the early 1950s. The state, itself deadlocked and incapable of taking many major initiatives, was not even responsive to the attempts by CISL leaders to persuade the Christian Democrats to adopt policies for integrating the unions into consultative bodies, and the *Consiglio Nazionale dell'Economia e del Lavoro*, in which the unions participated, was virtually unused (Weitz 1975: 229, 230). At the same time the inability of Italian governments to resolve decisively the conflicts between the continuing Fascist legal code and the 'liberal' aspirations of the post-war constitution left the area of industrial relations largely unregulated by law (Giugni 1971). This gave to Italian industrial relations a legal context not unlike that of the UK, even though the formative influences were so different. Apart from severe restrictions on industrial action in parts of the public sector (Wedderburn 1972), the law both gave unions few rights and imposed on them few restraints. The right to strike was unregulated and apart from mediation there was little government intervention in disputes.

Potentially therefore the Italian situation offered considerable scope to the unions once they could prove capable of wielding some power, while the state had few corporatist resources at its disposal. The growth of union power began to occur in the early 1960s and in unevenly distributed geographical areas, as Regini *et al.* explain in their paper in Volume 1. Because of the continued hostility of small private employers, most developments occurred in the public sector or in the larger companies. Significantly, this initial development away from a position of 'conflictual powerlessness' was ac-

accompanied by a slight tendency for the bargaining to acquire a corporatist element: for the first time since 1946 the unions, including those of CGIL, signed peace clauses as part of collective agreements (Giugni 1972).

In several respects the role of the French state in industrial relations has been the mirror image of that of the German. In the latter country a coercive and corporatist legal framework has existed alongside an absence of detailed government involvement in economic affairs; in France there has developed an advanced technocratic form of state indicative planning and a large public sector, but a very limited degree of state intervention in the activities and powers of organised groups (which are themselves in any case more poorly developed in France than in Germany (Barbash 1972: Ch. 7)). Although elaborate mechanisms exist for securing the involvement of the unions in the planning bodies, the evidence suggests that their role is an ineffective and largely symbolic one; the state's involvement has not really been part of a voluntarist tripartite arrangement (*ibid.*). At the same time, economic planning has not involved the articulation of a full incomes policy, though gestures have been made in this direction.

The legal structure of industrial relations is not unlike that of Italy. Until the mid-1960s there were no attempts at imposing on unions a responsibility for industrial peace (Giugni 1972); and the right to strike belongs to the individual worker acting with his fellow-workers (Schmidt, F., 1972). France has differed from Italy in its state planning apparatus, and after the installation of Fifth Republic in 1958 this was joined by a powerful political apparatus as well. However, there was initially no attempt at engaging these mechanisms in industrial relations. The level of tripartite voluntarist discussions was particularly undeveloped. Such a strategy was facilitated by the position of both the employers and the unions. French employers have largely refused to treat with the unions at any level, and have in particular rejected any union role at the level of the enterprise. For their part the unions, apart from Force Ouvrière, have exhibited organisational weakness and a *contestative* strategy which combine to exclude them from bargaining relationships. Treating collective bargaining as a form of class collaboration, they have stressed demonstrative strikes as displays of power and organisational ability, and have been particularly concerned to use these as demands for government (as opposed to employer) action. Paradoxically the formal institutional structure assists such a policy: while the right to *negotiate* does not extend to either enterprise or *inter-professionnel* levels, there are no similar legal restrictions on the level at which *strike action* may be called; and the important economic role of the state makes it relevant to make demands from it rather than from employers who are in any case reluctant to recognise the unions. Further, French practice on the conclusion of agreements discourages unions from bothering with them. An agreement is considered to be reached once any one of the unions involved is willing to sign it. Clearly militant unions have everything to gain from refusing to sign any agreement, relying on one of the conservative unions doing so and therefore ensuring that the workers get the benefit of some concessions while being able to claim that they would have

stood out for something far better.

Changes can first be detected in these characteristic patterns in the early 1960s. In 1963, following a prolonged mining strike, the Government introduced legislation providing that, in the case of public-sector strikes: (1) there must be a specific period of notice; and (2) the notice must be given by a representative union (Ramm 1972). The large size of the public sector in France makes this an important limitation, and it constituted a severe limitation on the scope for short, sudden strikes. But perhaps most significant was the role given to unions; this marked a first tentative step towards using unions as *Ordnungsfaktoren*. In 1965, after some attempt in public-sector industries to develop collective bargaining with the unions, there were initially successful attempts to persuade the unions to sign agreements that would run for eighteen months – a slight shift towards the peace obligation. The government also began some attempts at engaging the unions in tripartite dialogue as a prelude to the introduction of incomes policy; in 1963 a lengthy *Conférence de Revenus* was held, though with no practical outcome. Gaullist policy also involved attempts at encouraging the involvement of workers in their companies through elaborate profit-sharing plans (Malles 1973: 197). These all marked important departures from the typical French pattern towards a more corporatist structure, though the extent to which they were successful was very limited indeed.

## DEVELOPMENTS FROM THE LATE 1960s ONWARDS

With the exception of the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent West Germany and Belgium, the corporatist structures which were being erected in Western European countries as they emerged from the Second World War did not, therefore, prove to be the guarantors of cohesion in the emerging new society that they might initially have been expected to be. At first, in some countries poor union organisation and continuing high unemployment postponed the problem of the state confronting a highly organised work-force strengthened by tight labour markets. As time passed the situation changed, and the high level of economic growth which characterised the period of post-war recovery both made it possible to make economic concessions to workers and reduced the need for tight labour discipline. The strict order of the corporatist state was not required. The societies of the West seemed to have found a new and historically unique basis for social cohesion, which was duly celebrated in sociological literature as the age of affluence, the end of ideology and the withering away of class conflict.

As is discussed at length elsewhere in this volume by Soskice (page 234), in each of these European countries these characteristics of the post-war economy began to change. Evidence of the effects of initial developments in the early 1960s have already been encountered in the foregoing discussions of national cases. Prosperity was becoming less readily assured. In several countries measures were taken to intensify workers' effort, to protect the share

of profits in the national income and to restrain the extent to which workers took advantage of full employment to make demands.

In examining the changes in state policy which have taken place in the course of the ensuing intensification of conflict, it is tempting to speak of the state and employers making a 'response' to workers' militancy. However, as other papers in this project and the following discussion show, it is more accurate to speak of a complex interaction between measures taken by state and employers, economic changes, and responses by workers. As before, the different countries will be discussed in turn and knowledge of the detailed factual record contained in Volume 1 will be presupposed. Contradictory processes at work within the individual societies will here simply be noted; their significance will be assessed in the concluding section of the paper.

The best starting-point is the United Kingdom, for it is there that the pace of institutional change has been most intense. Changes began, as noted, in the early 1960s, but a detailed engagement of the unions with incomes policy did not occur until 1964 with the accession to office of a party with close links with the unions and an overall commitment to economic planning (Crouch 1977; Panitch 1976). First, the Government persuaded the TUC, under the fear of greater statutory controls, to police its own policy of incomes restraint. Second, unions were encouraged to relate their pay claims to the rate of increase in productivity rather than use bargaining power. Third, there was great stress on productivity bargaining, an important aim of which was the involvement of workers in decision-making over changes in work practices according to criteria established primarily by management.

Initial union collaboration with the policy met with eventual resistance from the well-developed centres of shop-floor power, and in 1969 the Government turned to its strategy of industrial relations law reform, attempting unsuccessfully to impose legislative controls on the right to strike and an *Ordnungsfaktor* role on unions. The Labour Government's attempts in this direction were very limited in scope and anyway collapsed but the Industrial Relations Act eventually introduced by the succeeding Conservative Government in 1971 gave English law the package of corporatist controls which it had always lacked. Although the Act was cast within a *laissez faire* rhetoric it incorporated: responsibility of unions for the conduct of their members; legal definitions of a trade union, placing both rights and obligations under legal supervision; limitations on the right to organise a strike to bodies acceptable to the state; judicial procedures for the settlement of grievances over a wide range of issues, including many that had traditionally been resolved through bargaining (Crouch 1977: ch. 9). However, as with Labour's more modest attempts, the law met with massive union resistance and very little of it was used successfully by employers or the state before its repeal in 1974 by a new Labour administration (Weekes *et al.* 1975).

By 1972 the emphasis of policy had shifted towards statutory incomes policy (which erected strict criteria for pay increases, virtually suspending the operation of bargaining) and attempts at engaging the unions in tripartite

discussions (aimed at securing their assent to the Government's policy goals and thus their co-operation in restraining workers' demands). The corporatism of this was, if anything, more thoroughgoing than that of the Act. The unions took advantage of the state's offer to engage in talks to raise wide-ranging social and economic policy demands. The gulf between them was too great for any true consensus, though it is notable that for over a year few unions challenged the pay policy outright. When the challenge eventually came, with the miners' strike, the Government's final measures before leaving office were strongly corporatist: a propaganda appeal to the people as a whole, using nationalistic symbols and appealing to the virtues of 'firmness and fairness'.

The minority Labour Government which emerged from the *débâcle* of the February 1974 election repealed the Industrial Relations Act and the statutory incomes policy, but intensified the process of tripartite bargaining over wage restraint and social reforms under the rubric of the 'social contract', leaning hard on its special links with the unions to generate a considerable degree of consensus with the union leaderships. During the first year the unions made several substantial gains through this tripartite system, which took them closer to policy-making than they had been before. However, it was becoming clear that the commitment to restraint was not widely shared among shop-floor activists, while from summer 1975 onwards Britain's increasing unemployment rate and the pressure for alternative policies from overseas holders of sterling led to a major shift in the balance of power. Incomes policy was reintroduced, though administered voluntarily through the tripartite forum. Economic policy in general drifted away from that worked out jointly by the Labour Party and the TUC.

The main legacies of the unions' period of strength are themselves ambiguous. There is a Government commitment to introduce workers' participation: a response to union demands but also an attempt at encouraging involvement. Three Acts of Parliament have considerably strengthened the legal rights of unions and workers – marking in so doing a distinct shift towards a legally defined union movement. Any corporatist potentialities of this last have not yet developed, but they are there. As pointed out in the chapter on Britain in Volume 1 (page 248), the administrative structure of the new legislation was deliberately established under tripartite supervision to avoid the danger of state control; since then, however, incomes policy itself has been administered by tripartite machinery. In many ways this shift symbolises the large but ambiguous movements of policy in Britain. The old Ministry of Labour, whose neutrality was accepted, became discredited in union eyes as an instrument of government restraint policies. Formerly state institutions therefore became tripartite and voluntary, largely as a result of union pressure; and now the state is beginning to use tripartite bodies as the means to secure new controls.

There are interesting similarities between developments in the UK and those in Italy, though in the latter case they are compressed into a briefer time span. At first there was scant evidence of any establishment of consensus. If the

initial increase in union strength in Italy saw the negotiation of agreements which accepted 'truce' clauses, the great upsurge in shop-floor discontent from 1968 onwards, and the new level of union involvement in strikes after 1969, rejected devices of this kind. The unions initiated a dialogue with the state when they began to use their new strength to raise political demands – itself a response to the deadlocked party-political system. A mark of the unions' power in this period was their ability to refuse to accept the participation of Confindustria in the tripartite discussions, though there was never a cessation in ordinary collective bargaining relations. After the recession began to reduce labour's power in 1973 this participation had to be accepted, particularly as the decline in private-sector investment and 'loss of confidence' were becoming problems.

The unions secured little success in their demands for wider reforms, and these in any case became more defensive as the recession deepened. Just as in Britain, however, they secured notable successes in legislation which helped unions' organising strength in a significant and genuine way, though not without certain corporatist implications. The main example is the *Statuto dei Lavoratori* which, like the British legislation of 1974–6, included among its provisions those which were helpful to activists and individual workers and others which were decidedly favourable towards the established confederations. As in Britain, union rights such as that of recognition were becoming increasingly based on legal provision as opposed to the autonomous strength of the members and union organisation. This was occurring at a time when the confederations were being pressed by the government to take part in discussions of the state of the economy, and being challenged by increasing militancy both on the shop floor and in the individual industrial unions. In giving the unions a recognised presence on the shop floor the *Statuto* also marks abandonment of the post-war policy of encouraging systems of representation which excluded the unions at this level.

CGIL rejected the invitation to participate in tripartite discussions aimed at formulating a common policy on the explicit grounds that this constituted corporatism. However, the theme continues in talk of the *patto sociale* and at the political level in the still awaited *compromesso storico*. On the face of it, the possible entry of the Communist Party into coalition with the Christian Democrats (or even the tacit support which they are at present offering) would appear to have highly corporatist implications for industrial relations. However, this neglects the changes which have taken place in the relation between unions and political parties since the Communists left the coalition in 1947. One consequence of the increased shop-floor militancy of recent years has been to loosen the hegemony of the PCI over the shop floor, the industrial unions and even the CGIL itself. At the same time of course the hold of DC over CISL has become much weaker. Meanwhile the union confederations have been able to acquire a stronger unity than the parties to which they are variously affiliated (Weitz 1975). It is doubtful whether any agreement which operated solely at the party, or even union leadership, level would have much overall effect. If the level of conflict in Italy has declined, it is as a result of the

recession rather than of a new national consensus.

Such developments as there have been in France have been not dissimilar, and most commentators agree that little has in fact occurred to disturb the basic pattern of French industrial relations. Those developments which have taken place can be traced back to before the crisis of 1968, as has been shown above, but it was after that crisis, and again in 1971, that the Government stepped up its attempts to engage the unions in some kind of dialogue. *Les accords de Grenelle* established a pattern which has become increasingly common: national-level discussions, during which the unions make demands and at the end of which the Government announces that it will support various reforms and concessions (without necessarily securing the signature of the unions to the agreement) (Reynaud 1975). Grenelle was however an exception in being formally tripartite. More usually the negotiations, though encouraged by government, have been between employer and union federations, with the state offering legislative support for the outcome – a pattern not unlike that long familiar in Belgium. Agreements to increase the national minimum wage and protect it from inflation, important reforms to the age and conditions of retirement, changes in conditions of work, provision for participation and an increased role for the unions in the plant have all issued from discussions of this kind (Dubois, n.d.). Meanwhile, the demands raised by the unions have sought far wider changes. In the course of this process several developments have occurred. First, the Government itself is seeking constantly to engage the unions in dialogue, with the eventual but at present remote prospect of securing their consent to some form of incomes policy (Reynaud 1975). Second, in doing this the Government has had to sacrifice something of the *dirigisme* of its earlier planning strategies; the process of national discussions and concessions involves a greater degree of union influence than the formal consultative mechanism of the official planning machinery; and in the absence of an incomes policy the recent current of inflation has made it necessary for the Government to resign some of its attempted controls over economic development. Third, since several of the agreements which have resulted from the bipartite national discussions have led almost automatically to legislation, that forum has acquired a *de facto* legislative role (*ibid.*).

Among the laws which have been introduced are those affecting union rights and powers. Negotiations at inter-professional and enterprise levels have been recognised (*loi de 13 juillet 1971*); and the rights of unions within the plants have received stronger official acknowledgement and been the subject of greater regulation (*loi de 27 décembre 1968*). Under the slogan of *participation* which the Government appropriated after *les événements* further changes were also introduced to encourage increased non-conflictual involvement through strengthened *comités d'entreprise*.

Related to these developments granting a new role to the unions within the plant, both the Government and to an increasing extent the employers have encouraged collective bargaining at enterprise level. As already indicated this process had begun before the 1968 crisis, but since then the tempo of change

has accelerated. The Government has encouraged *accords de productivité* in the public sector, though in order to secure the participation of the CGT managements have had to drop the rudimentary *Friedenspflicht* clauses attempted in these agreements in the mid-1960s. The employers have not only come to accept bargaining, but in order to make possible the tripartite national negotiations sought by the Government, they have had to accept the right of the CNPF to negotiate for them on a national basis. This principle was established in 1968, and in subsequent years important agreements resulted from the process, encouraged and guaranteed by the Government in legislative and other measures open to it. In entering these arrangements the unions have been presented with a problem. The two major confederations do not wish to lose their *contestative* stand, and also need to avoid reaching agreements which will involve them in controlling their own members. At the same time the national-level discussions provide them with an opportunity to press political demands on a wide scale. In general they have been able to participate in the negotiations without compromising themselves because of the nature of French collective agreements already discussed; and if they do sign an agreement they have felt free to repudiate it afterwards. In addition to the significance of these changes at the industrial level, they denote certain important shifts in the relation of the union confederations to politics. Reynaud (1975:212 ff.) suggests that the unions began to take the initiative in politics on the left following the collapse of the parties of the left in 1962. It was in that period that the CFDT began its process of major changes in its political stance. The aftermath of 1968 has intensified these tendencies very strongly. As already noted, the tripartite negotiations have become a form of *de facto* legislature, in a context where the Constitution of the Fifth Republic renders the National Assembly ineffective. The unions have therefore had the initiative in developing and prosecuting working-class political demands. In the case of the independent CFDT this has been done outside any tutelage from a political party; where the CGT is concerned this aspect of initiative is less clear. By 1973 and 1974, with the development of the *programme commun* this process came full circle. From being the creatures of political parties the unions (especially the CFDT) had moved through a period of political non-involvement, into one of taking the political initiative on the left, ending in a certain reintegration with party forces as they have joined (CGT, CFDT and FO alike) in seeking with the parties to construct some kind of unified labour movement.

It would be wrong to place too much stress on these developments. Collective bargaining is not an established aspect of industrial relations; their enhanced political importance has not radically affected the unions' prevailing organisational weakness; there is not a unified French labour movement. Despite the vast number of initiatives and policy stances adopted by the various groups involved over the past few years, most commentators seem agreed that the essential framework of a *contestative* industrial relations system in which negotiations and bargaining at all levels play a relatively minor role remains.

The policy of *programmation sociale* which had been pursued since 1960 in Belgium is not dissimilar to the more recent and less successful moves of the French state, and after the escalation of conflict in 1970 the Belgian Government and employers tried to reinforce the scope of this device. As in Britain and France they wanted to increase the range of issues which could be negotiated with unions at a national tripartite level in order to secure predictable order and commit the unions to a set of agreed goals, following which they would be expected to secure the compliance of the workforce. As in the other countries, this step towards an increased corporatism was by no means unambiguous. The degree of shop-floor militancy was such that agreement could not readily be secured, the unions could not or would not assert control, and the national agreements were not successful in combating shop-floor bargains but had to coexist with them. At the same time, these national agreements have continued the pattern long familiar in Belgium but more recently of increasing significance in other countries as well, whereby bipartite or tripartite agreements propose legislative changes which are virtually underwritten by the state.

Also as elsewhere, the recession made unions more amenable. The scope of bargaining in Belgium has long been highly structured, with the widespread use of indexation agreements, but the FGTB has always emphatically rejected formal incomes policy. By the end of 1975, however, the Government was able to secure union agreement to an incomes policy as part of its strategy against inflation.

While the crisis in West Germany has been of far lesser proportions than in the other countries discussed so far, the Government's concern for economic stability, and in particular for controlling inflation, has led to an important degree of state intervention, while at the same time the workers have themselves been posing their own new demands. In the mid-1960s, the *Sachverständigenrat* argued that the more or less implicit guidelines which governed collective bargaining were less likely to be adequate to secure order in the more difficult economic conditions now expected. They advocated the policy known as *konzertierte Aktion* in which tripartite discussions would co-ordinate actions in the pursuit of agreed economic policy objectives, as set down by the Government in the form of certain key targets – the *Orientierungsdaten*. The significance of this proposal was that it involved action at the tripartite level formerly neglected in German institutions. It also involved a measure of state economic planning and to a certain extent threatened the abstention of the more overtly political elements of the state from involvement in economic affairs.

This interpretation of its significance is strengthened by the fact that the Christian Democratic Government refused to accept the quantification of its economic goals which was requested, and the unions therefore withheld co-operation until the entry of the Social Democratic Party to government in the 'big coalition' in 1967 led to government acceptance of this limited degree of planning.

As discussed by Müller-Jentsch and Sperling, the unions' acquiescence in

restraint was itself an important immediate cause of the *Septemberstreiks* of 1969, and it was as both unions and Government adapted their policies in the light of this new evidence of rank-and-file unrest that further policy changes occurred. The Government became less ambitious. Whereas the *Orientierungsdaten* in the initial phase specified precise targets, by the 1970s they simply indicated a fairly broad range (Schiff 1972). The Government also began, in an attempt to secure union co-operation, to pay greater attention to union policy demands than in the past, over both the direction of economic policy and more specifically in the extension of *Mitbestimmung* to industries outside coal, iron and steel in 1973 (Willey 1974). There were also important changes to the *Betriebsräte* in the *Betriebsverfassungsgesetz* of 1972, though these were less unambiguously a concession to union demands. The law gave slightly increased scope and powers to the *Betriebsräte*, while (i) not departing from their general role as non-conflictual and supportive of managerial interests, and (ii) not changing their particular function as an alternative form of representation to the unions as such (and particularly to the *Vertrauensleute* who were increasingly becoming the spear-head of the new militancy).

For their part the unions began to adopt what was, for the post-war German labour movement, a more demanding stand. Increasingly their co-operation was dependent on the pursuit of particular policies by the Government. Following the upsurge of shop-floor militancy the unions could no longer adopt without major alteration the Government's policy priorities. Greater stress was placed on the maintenance of workers' standard of living as opposed to the pursuit of economic indicators. And in any case the wage policy of individual unions paid decreasing attention to the *Orientierungsdaten*.

They also sought a degree of egalitarianism in pay policy and various measures of social reform within the compass of the Government's own slogan of *Sozialsymmetrie*. It would be going too far to claim that German unions were now adopting a bargaining strategy in their relations with the state; they were not threatening action if their political demands were not met. However, a marked shift towards bargaining at the level of tripartite negotiations is indicated in that union collaboration was increasingly dependent on concessions.

In many ways the German industrial relations system remains intact: the coercive apparatus of civil law remains; several major unions remain highly collaborationist; the level of strikes remains low; the crisis of the early 1970s hit this prosperous economy less severely than it did several others. However, against this continuity has to be set: the deviation from the social market economy through the Government's involvement in *konzertierte Aktion* and its associated establishment of *Orientierungsdaten* (the rudiments of both planning and incomes policy); the recent tendency for union wage policy to breach these guidelines; the beginnings of an element of policy bargaining between state and unions; the Government's failure to use its extensive legal apparatus to challenge the upsurge of shop-floor militancy; and the need to make at least some shifts towards the recognition of shop-floor activity, even if this has taken the form of amendments to the powers of the collaborative *Betriebsräte*.

The German case, like the others discussed so far, shows that the recent period has not been one of unambiguous increase in corporatism, but one in which governments have sought to initiate corporatist devices in a hostile environment. This point is shown particularly clearly in the case of the Netherlands, where post-war corporatist policies had remained most intact. After the collapse of the incomes policy under the pressure of workers' demands, the government had to try to rebuild consensus. In an attempt at making the system more responsive to workers' demands, the constitution of the works council was changed in 1971 to reduce the domination of the employer. Wage controls were largely (though by no means fully) abandoned. The unions have even begun to make social-reform demands as conditions for their continued co-operation in the Sociaal-Economisch Raad, and the level of conflict is considerably intensified (Barbash 1972:75). At the same time the guidelines which are accepted for wage bargaining are still very narrow, and in the context of the energy crisis the Government was able, without much opposition, to increase its powers of control and reach agreement with the unions on a tighter incomes policy.

Akkermans and Grootings discuss the decline in the ideological unity which was important to union adherence to the former corporatism. They also describe the changes taking place in the Netherlands as being to more 'liberal' bargaining of the kind common in other Western economies. This is certainly how the change appears as viewed from within the highly corporatist Dutch system. However, when these developments are seen in the context of the other countries it may be more useful to speak in terms of a kind of convergence towards a form of heavily bargained corporatism. Outside the Netherlands, and perhaps Germany, it is not the dismantling of corporatist institutions which is most striking but attempts at their establishment – attempts which are taking place, however, against considerable difficulties. Seen in this light, although the Dutch movement may be in a different direction from those elsewhere, the ensuing pattern has several similarities. This point will be considered in more detail below.

## CONCLUSIONS

Ostensibly corporatism provides an ideal solution to the central problem of modern capitalism: the maintenance of order where market relations are no longer supreme, where the division between polity and economy can no longer be sustained, and where both the working class and capital are organised. However, the essential requirement of corporatism – sufficient ideological consensus to conceal the conflicts inherent in the class relationship – is lacking. Modern capitalism is best able to integrate its work force under conditions of rising mass prosperity. This provides something closely resembling consensus, making possible agreement on certain overall goals, the avoidance of conflict (by reducing the constraints of scarcity) and the conversion of bargaining into institutionalised *concertation*. But the

agreement which results from prosperity differs from true ideological consensus in that it is dependent on performance. Bargaining is of itself *concertative* only: (1) where consensus exists, making possible the elaboration of rules for the settlement of conflict; and/or (2) where demands can be absorbed.

As the conditions of a relatively easily secured prosperity which characterised the post-war period began to recede, questions which had gradually dimmed in significance since the 1940s began to reappear. What would have to be conceded if a new consensus was to be forged? How would societies that seemed increasingly fragmented morally find overall cohesion if they needed to mobilise in a way which had become unfamiliar? What would be the relationship between the corporate apparatus, based on organised social groups, and the apparatus of the bourgeois-democratic state, based on the Parliamentary representation of individuals?

Governments have been drawn towards corporatist policies, not as a result of a grand design, a carefully constructed plan for a new conservatism. Rather, they have been driven to them in crises, *faute de mieux*, as they have sought to reinstitutionalise conflict following the breakdown of the late 1960s (see Chapter 1). For this reason it is far easier to discern corporatist *attempts* than instances of successful imposition. The period which began to gather momentum in the late 1960s was one both of increased labour militancy and of increased attempts by the state to secure order. The two processes frequently coalesced – in such devices as national tripartite negotiations – and it is not surprising that it is sometimes unclear whether it is organised labour or capital which is gaining from a particular new development.

The tendency of much of the literature has been to see the recent developments almost solely in terms of union gains through their increased involvement in economic policy (Schregle 1974: 21; Kassalow 1974; Willey 1974: 39–41, on Germany alone). There has not yet been time for much to be written on the developments which took place as the recession took hold and union power slipped back. However, some authors have discerned the state's integrative motive as well. Barbash (1972: 162 ff.) offers an analysis not dissimilar to that presented here, seeing governments responding to the pressures of the 'post full-employment period' and seeking alternative measures to the unattractive choice between inflation and high unemployment. He describes the emerging pattern as one of 'economic policy unionism', and explicitly rejects the label 'corporatism' on the grounds that this suggests that the state's demands alone are reflected in policy (*ibid.*: 181). He considers that corporatism more fittingly describes the system of French *dirigiste* planning. The difficulty with this is that corporatism tries to control society through organised groups in a way which is not really attempted under the French system. Since the intention of the state is to seek to bend the unions to accept its own policies, it has been considered preferable here to speak of a corporatist strategy which has to indulge in bargaining and concessions because of the absence of coercive or moral constraints to buttress it; this then directs attention to attempts to acquire such constraints.

However, the difference with Barbash is largely semantic.

Roberts (1972) similarly describes the search for 'organic unity between the state, employers and unions', discussing policies for increased worker participation and improved worker 'loyalty'. He stresses the pluralism of these arrangements, pointing to the constantly balancing shift of power, and contrasting this with the subordination of producers under the state in the Soviet system (ibid.: 76). Again, however, it must be stressed that organic strategies only succeed to the extent that this pluralism, at least on the part of unions, is reduced; its continued strength is simply a mark of the lack of success of the state's plans. Such measures as legal restraints on union action (as in Germany and, briefly, in Britain) can only be interpreted as attempts to reduce pluralism; and the constraints induced by increased unemployment have the same effect. Roberts states (ibid.: 77):

As employees are given the opportunity to participate in the making of managerial decisions at all levels in the enterprise there will be less reason for their unions acting as an adversary of management.

This begs questions of the distribution of power after the participative devices have been established.

The complexity of the balance of forces can be illustrated by considering some of the developments which have been discussed. Most prominent are the tripartite national-level mechanisms which have featured in each of the countries studied. During the peak of labour militancy these were the platforms on which unions presented their new policy demands, marking a breach in the institutionalisation of conflict which for many years had contained labour's political activity. And governments were forced to treat directly with union leaderships in tackling the crises; they could not rely solely on civil-law measures, manipulations of the market economy, the establishment of *dirigiste* planning bodies or of decentralised conciliation boards. They had to bargain with the unions, offering concessions, even if their ambitions were to use the tripartite platforms to reach a level of *concertation*.

However, once the recession had begun to weaken labour's strength, its ability to raise demands was lessened. Unemployment reduced the importance of shop-floor strength, and capital's demands for conditions adequate for economic recovery pressed more heavily on governments. Labour's demands became more defensive, and in those cases where participation in talks persisted the unions gained fewer policy concessions but played an increasing part in securing the restraint of their members.

Tripartite institutions can reach only the leaderships of unions, and following the upsurge of shop-floor militancy which was everywhere important to the resurgence of conflict this was recognised to be inadequate. Devices for encouraging the involvement of workers in their firms had existed in a variety of ways throughout the post-war period, and in several instances further measures of this kind were introduced, as we have seen. Alongside these were the ambiguous reforms adopted in several countries for strengthen-

ing the position of the unions within the workplace, including provision for their participation in works councils, from which they had in some countries been deliberately excluded (Malles 1973: 165). In some senses this constituted a straightforward gain by organised labour. The barrier between 'bargaining' and 'consultation' was breaking down (Schregle, 1974: 7, 18), and the unions had grown too powerful. However, the shop-floor movement was in part a revolt against union leaderships which had become remote from their members precisely because of this isolation from the work-place; further, there was little point in governments integrating union leaderships if these were not in close contact with the main points of militancy. The earlier exclusion of unions from the work-place had proved counter-productive. The eventual possibilities of legislation of the recent kind can be seen in the Belgian *Loi sur les conventions collectives*, 1968, which limits recognition rights to unions represented on the national tripartite bodies (Malles 1973:72). A further purpose of the establishment of union and worker rights was to secure the settlement of disputes over these by appeal to established law rather than through conflict and bargaining.

Its reliance on autonomous workers' organisations bearing a major share of the task of restraining labour's demands is some indication of the lack of resources for securing cohesion available to the modern state, and the degree of success in achieving this goal has varied widely. For example, in West Germany unions have never repudiated the role of *Ordnungsfaktor*, while in France they have virtually never accepted it. There has again also been variation with economic conjuncture, as is seen in the shift of British unions towards acceptance of voluntary income restraint as the state of the economy worsened.

The frequent dependence on links between union movements and political parties to achieve the integration of unions is similarly variable and an expression of weakness. This theme is discussed in detail elsewhere in this volume by Deppe, Herding and Hoss in terms of its implications for the union and shop-floor movements, but it also has implications for the state itself. There are several instances of the striking success of the relationship in securing the desired cohesion: in Germany with the 'big coalition' and *konzertierte Aktion* in 1967; in Britain with the incomes policy of 1975 and 1976; and on a continuing basis in Belgium and the Netherlands where Social Democratic parties are frequent coalition partners. The continuing exclusion of the Communist parties from office in France and Italy has clearly diminished such policies there; however, the growing success of the *programme commun* in the former and the possibility of the *compromesso storico* in the latter have at least placed such an issue on the political agenda.

One weakness of reliance on the party-union link is that it may entail continuing concession to labour's demands; no matter how compromised the parties become in office they must continue to offer something to organised labour if they are to attract continued loyalty. More important, the link between working-class parties, the unions and the wider public (including union members) is itself rarely a powerful source of cohesion, with the possible

exception of Communist electorates. The party-union relationship is more often a rickety network of patronage, personal contacts, historical legacy and bureaucratic inertia. Further, there is evidence that the parties have weakened in relation to the unions in a way previously unfamiliar outside Belgium and the UK. This lessens their value in constraining the unions, and also has wider implications.

Windmuller (1975: 207) has pointed out that the involvement of unions in political bargaining is an indication that union movements have seized the political initiative from the political parties of the left. This marks an interesting reversal of the concept of the separate functions of unions and parties which has in the past been adopted by both Communist movements and proponents of the thesis of the institutionalisation of conflict (e.g. Dahrendorf 1959). In part this can be attributed to special factors (such as Belgium's linguistic divisions), but more generally relevant has been the fact that the state, in becoming increasingly involved in the management of the economy, has come to negotiate increasingly with what have been called the 'producer groups' (Beer 1965). Where the organisations representing labour are concerned, there is an additional point, overlooked by Beer and similar writers, and also by those who like Windmuller (1975: 207) see merely the phenomenon of increased union 'leftism', that the state sees unions as potential forces for mobilising and integrating the mass of workers. This has become an important need of the state with the decline of other sources of social cohesion. Political parties are not capable of providing mobilisation of this kind, it being indeed almost a condition of 'bourgeois democracy' that beyond involvement in elections and adoption of a party identity most people are not deeply involved in the political process. Parliamentary representation does not provide an adequate vehicle for the complex set of relations between the modern capitalist state and civil society. Faced with similar problems, fascist regimes replace parliaments with an artificial hierarchy of corporatist unions and orchestrate national propaganda campaigns. The liberal societies with which we are concerned have lacked the apparatus of coercion which this requires. (It is notable in this respect that the major instance of an attempt at popular mobilisation, in Britain over the 1974 mining strike, took the form of a general election campaign – the only occasion when 'bourgeois democracy' provides for mobilisation.) They have therefore had to try to persuade unions to adopt this role. Not only are the unions themselves not very well equipped for it, but their co-operation has to be bought.

Not surprisingly, the new corporatism can as yet lay claim to few major advances. By and large it is seen in operation only when buttressed by those alternatives sources of order the inadequacies of which it is designed to replace: continued prosperity (as in West Germany) or high unemployment (as in Britain). Nevertheless, as has been shown above, the very appearance of corporatist devices draws attention to some important shifts within the structure of the modern state, extending beyond the particular field of industrial relations. It has here been possible merely to sketch broad outlines, draw conclusions about the implications of policies without detailed analysis

of them, and point to some further important questions. Hopefully enough has been done to indicate the value of closer study of these themes.

## NOTES

1. Consensual relations in a situation of inequality imply that subordinates 'trust' those exercising power over them. For subordinates to threaten sanctions in order to secure concessions implies a breakdown of that trust. For an extended discussion, see Fox 1974.
2. It is assumed that the reader has available the factual descriptions of the different countries contained in the companion volume, *The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe since 1968*, Volume 1: *National Studies*.

# 9 *Strike Waves and Wage Explosions, 1968–1970: an Economic Interpretation*<sup>1</sup>

DAVID SOSKICE

## INTRODUCTION

The low level of industrial conflict in post-war Europe was paralleled by annual wage inflation rates seldom above 10 per cent and price inflation typically below 5 per cent and the rise in strike activity in the late 1960s was accompanied by inflation rates at a noticeably higher level. The North American experience bears some similarities: conflictuality and inflation have been higher in the 1970s than at any previous time since the Second World War. But there are important differences. In the industrialised countries of Western Europe the change in conditions (between 1968 and 1970 in each country discussed here) has the character of a break; in the USA and Canada the development begins earlier (in the mid 1960s) and builds up more gradually.

This paper focuses on these initial strike waves in the major European countries. They are seen by many observers as key turning-points in the development both of industrial relations systems and of the pace of inflation. Increased power, confidence and organisation of workers at plant level were a direct concomitant of these events, augmented in some instances by the deliberate response of government, unions or employers to institutionalise them. In addition, without prejudice to causality: the initial growth of inflationary expectations in Europe occurs at this period; and the wage accelerations in the four countries<sup>2</sup> accompany the strike waves rather closely. Much of the industrial conflict of the early 1970s was induced by government counter-inflationary policies implemented to reverse the inflationary spiral which started in the late 1960s. The increased militancy of national union leaderships in the early 1970s was in part in response to the growth of unofficial action in the late 1960s; but it also represented the growing militancy of previously quiescent groups, especially among white-collar and public-sector employees, who bore much of the brunt of the counter-inflationary policies.

The strike waves of 1968–70 are thus important to our understanding of what has followed. To chart the currents which generated them involves much of the economic history of Western capitalism from at least the late 1950s. This essay is therefore at most a sketch. Some coherence is imparted by the requirements of a successful explanation. It must explain first the *synchronous* nature of the waves: that they all occurred between 1968 and 1970. Secondly, it must explain the *form* the waves took: that they were essentially unofficial. Next, why it was that the North American experience was different. And finally, why the accelerations in wage inflation accompanied the strike waves. No one would of course want to deny the important causal roles in the strike waves of factors peculiar to the individual country – the state of universities in France or the crisis of social development in Italy are obvious examples – and systematic differences in industrial relations systems are briefly discussed to explain certain differences in the strike waves. But what seems equally clear is that some common factors must have been at work.

The orthodox economic explanation of the world-wide acceleration of inflation in the late 1960s is based on the overheating of the US economy in the mid-1960s, primarily as a result of the Vietnam War. Extended as it has been into an explanation of the rise in industrial conflict, it meets in theory but not in empirical detail the first and last requirements above, but not the second and third. This argument is developed on pages 223 ff.

The focus of the argument there is the difference between the European and American economies from the end of the 1950s. The European recession of the mid-1960s is seen as the government-induced consequence of the inflationary boom from the mid-late 1950s to the mid-1960s, the honeymoon of the Common Market. This contrasts with the American experience of high unemployment in 1960 and gradual expansion throughout the ensuing decade. The mid-1960s recessions in Europe were used by governments to impose effective incomes policies, whether explicit or implicit, to attack the problems of inflation and payments disequilibrium brought about by the boom; and by business to recoup in looser labour markets, through rationalisation and wage restraint at plant level, the profits lost in the boom. The decline in profitability in the early 1960s was partly a consequence of the massive expansion of trade and reduction of tariffs; and partly it was brought about by the squeeze between high domestic wage inflation and static world prices as a result of the US recession at the start of the 1960s. The unofficial strike waves are seen crudely as the response in the late 1960s to the effects on differentials, real wages and profit margins of incomes policies, with national unions co-opted or tied into long-term contracts they could not renegotiate, and of rationalisation and wage cutting at the plant level where national unions were powerless. The strikes are, on this interpretation, the delayed reaction to government and employer policies in the mid-1960s recession in Europe; their precise timing depends upon the particular institutional structures of the different countries: in Germany and Italy (and the smaller European countries) a tight labour market was important, and that in part reflected US conditions; but in France and the UK, in each for different

reasons, this was not a precondition. And the wage acceleration accompanying the strikes in each country, significantly greater than labour market tightness and prior price inflation would have suggested, was the requisite payment for strike settlements.

The argument set out in pages 231 ff is tentative. Its attraction is that it meets at a simple level the requirements set out above. It is also consistent with and provides an explanation of some recent work attaching importance to a rise in the share of profits in different countries before the wage explosion. However it is far from being a settled question, and much work remains to be done on the common factors in European economic development in the post-war period.

## THE AMERICAN EXPLANATION

The standard explanation put forward by economists of the acceleration of price and wage inflation in Europe in the late 1960s exposes the root cause as the rapid expansion and overheating of the American economy from the mid-1960s onwards. To quote a leading monetarist economist, H. G. Johnson, 'The fact that [the] world inflation . . . origin[ated] in President Johnson's failure to accompany the escalation of the war in Vietnam in 1965 with an appropriately large increase in taxes is now generally accepted.' (Johnson 1975: 4) On this view the rise in industrial conflict is seen as a consequence of the acceleration of inflation in Europe, hence as a consequence of the American overheating.

This section is divided into three parts. The first discusses how overheating of such magnitude was possible given the presumptively restraining influence of the international monetary system. In the second the mechanisms by which the overheating was transmitted into an acceleration of inflation in Europe are explored. Finally there is an examination of the link between the European acceleration of inflation and the rise in industrial conflict there.

## THE US OVERHEATING IN THE MID-1960s

There is little disagreement about the fact of the overheating and consequent inflation of the US economy from the mid-1960s to the end of the decade. That the inflation was consequent upon the overheating implies a theory of their relationship: there is good evidence for this in the American economy. What requires explanation is why the Government permitted the vast increase in expenditure on account of Vietnam and the 'Great Society' without a corresponding increase in taxation, thus generating the overheating and inflation and putting pressure on the balance of payments. One side of an explanation is that President Johnson attached high importance to a reduction in unemployment *per se*. However, in other countries such prolonged over-expansion would have been impossible; it would sooner or later have been reflected in the balance of payments, and, sooner or later

again, would have implied exhaustion of the reserves, from which a single devaluation or foreign loan could gain only temporary respite. The fixed exchange rate system ruled out continual devaluations and creditor countries ruled out increasing debts; in this way, within limits, 'international responsibility' could be enforced.

That the USA could avoid such enforcement lay in the reserve currency role of the dollar. The basis of the Bretton Woods system was that exchange rates were fixed in relation to the dollar, and the dollar was convertible into gold at a fixed rate of exchange. In such a system a country requires reserves of acceptable foreign currencies or gold to tide over fluctuations of trade, or more generally balance of payments deficits, without the need for continuous and brutal domestic policies to maintain external equilibrium. Because the dollar was convertible into gold, and hence 'as good as gold', the main reserve assets of the system as it developed were dollars and gold. The demand for reserve assets grew apace with the rapid expansion of international trade and the moderate inflation of the 1950s and 1960s: to meet the growing demand by other countries the gold stocks of the USA fell from over \$24 billion in 1949 to under \$12 billion in 1970; but there were only limited supplies of newly mined gold, and the USA was able to run balance-of-payments deficits through the 1950s and 1960s, the counterpart of which was an accumulation of dollars held abroad. If for much of the 1950s these dollars were willingly accumulated by foreign governments, in the latter part of the 1960s the USA could threaten implicitly the collapse of the whole system if governments abroad did not maintain their dollar holdings: for by then the weak financial position of the USA had become apparent. Thus the USA could subordinate international monetary considerations to internal political and external military requirements when the need arose as it did in the mid-1960s.

## THE INTERNATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF INFLATION

From the late 1960s to 1970 inflation rates accelerated in most countries in Western Europe. It has been taken for granted by most orthodox economists that this acceleration was caused by US overheating. But how the transmission of the American inflation to Europe took place is not agreed.

A theory of the transmission of inflation involves two steps. The first is a theory of inflation within a country: the rate of inflation in a country is causally determined by certain economic variables in that country, for instance the level of unemployment. The second step is to show how these determining variables are themselves, at least partially, determined by rates of inflation abroad.

The two main theories of inflation are the Keynesian and the monetarist. Common to both theories, the rate of money-wage inflation depends upon the pressure of demand in the labour market. This is typically measured, inversely, by the level of unemployment. It is usually assumed that an additional determinant is the rate at which prices are expected to increase over the life of the contract. Thus the rate of money-wage inflation is

hypothesised to be inversely related to the level of unemployment and positively to the expected rate of price inflation.

The second component of the theory is that the rate of price inflation depends upon two sets of factors: costs of production and the pressure of demand in the product market. If the cost of capital is ignored, domestic costs of production reduce to labour costs per unit of output, or in terms of a percentage increase, the rate of wage inflation *minus* the rate of growth of labour productivity; and the percentage change in the cost per unit of output of imported inputs is equal to the rate of inflation of the price of imports *minus* the rate of growth of the productivity of imports, though this latter will be ignored here. Thus, the rate of price inflation is positively related to the rate of wage inflation and import price inflation, and negatively related to the growth of labour productivity and to the level of unemployment (as a crude proxy for the pressure of demand in the product market).

A third component is necessary to complete this Keynesian/monetarist theory. This describes the determination of the expected rate of inflation. The expected rate of inflation is usually assumed to be based on current and past experience of inflation. This is commonly modelled by assuming that the expected rate is revised upwards if the current rate of inflation was higher than expected, and conversely. This is the model of 'adaptive expectations'. (Most empirical work is based on this model, as is the theory of strikes developed in this section: the main alternative approach, of 'rational expectations', – the rate which would be predicted by a forecaster using knowledge of how the economy works – torpedoes this theory of strikes.)

It might be thought that the theory of inflation implied by these three components can be dismissed by confronting it in a simple-minded way with the recent history of unemployment and inflation. *Prima facie*, the theory predicts that higher inflation will be accompanied by lower unemployment. That is not in fact correct. An important limiting case of the theory is the 'natural rate of unemployment' case. If the labour market is, in some average sense, in equilibrium there should be no tendency for the expected real wage to change<sup>3</sup>; that implies money wage inflation equal to the expected rate of inflation. Labour market equilibrium implies a particular level of unemployment (the 'natural' rate); hence, at the natural rate of unemployment, higher wage and price inflation and a higher expected rate of inflation are possible without lower unemployment. This case is contentious; while it applies to highly competitive labour markets or where unions have literally monopoly control over a labour market, its extension to the usual case of union/employer bargaining is somewhat artificial.

The natural rate of unemployment case allows a higher rate of inflation without a fall in unemployment even in the long run. In the shorter run (perhaps over a year or two years) wage and price inflation may only fall very slowly despite a high level of unemployment, if the expected rate of inflation takes a long time to adjust downwards. These two considerations point to the need for more sophisticated tests.

The theory can be tested in a number of ways. Of particular interest is its

ability to explain the acceleration of wage and price inflation in the countries under consideration. Two tests bearing specifically on this will be cited here. Maynard and van Ryckeghem (1976: ch 7) substitute the first and third elements of the theory into the second, thus positing that the rate of price inflation depends upon previous rates of price inflation, the level of unemployment, the inflation ratio of import prices and the growth of labour productivity; they then see whether the rate of inflation behaves as a stable linear combination of the variables in question, over the period 1954–68; and finally compare the predictions made by the model for the years 1969 and 1970. The model performs adequately, though not well, in each country with the exception of Italy; in Germany the percentage of the variance of the rate of price inflation ‘explained’ by the variance of the explanatory variables is 71 per cent, in Italy 49 per cent, France 60 per cent and in the UK 61 per cent:

TABLE 9.1: *Predicted and actual rates of price inflation*

	1969		1970	
	$P_a$	$P_c$	$P_a$	$P_c$
France	6.6	2.8	5.5	3.1
Germany	3.5	2.9	7.1	4.8
Italy	4.3	2.4	7.4	4.8
UK	5.6	3.9	7.3	2.7

$P_a$  = actual rate of price inflation

$P_c$  = predicted rate of price inflation.

However, when the model is used to predict the acceleration of price inflation in 1969 and 1970, the under-prediction is very striking. The main acceleration of price inflation in Germany, Italy and the UK occurred in 1970, with some increase in inflation rates in Italy and the UK in 1969, also, but less significantly, under-predicted. In France the acceleration of inflation started half-way through 1968 and was spread over 1968 and 1969; as can be seen, the under-prediction for 1969 is sharp.

An alternative test was conducted by Nordhaus (1972). He asked (substituting the third component of the theory outlined above into the first, and ignoring the second) to what extent the data on wage inflation, unemployment rates and past rates of inflation were consistent with the implied theory of money-wage inflation. He therefore directly tested the implications of the model for the rate of wage inflation. He did not examine Italy, but for France, Germany and the UK the model did not perform well: the values which the coefficients of the equations took to best approximate the data on wage inflation implied that in France and the UK a rise in unemployment increased the rate of wage inflation and in France and Germany a rise in the expected rate of price inflation reduced the rate of wage inflation. For these reasons too much importance should not be paid to the predictions, especially those for France:

TABLE 9.2: *Actual wage inflation minus predicted wage inflation*

	1968	1969	1970
France	1.6	1.1	1.5
Germany	-1.2	1.2	2.7
UK	1.3	0.6	4.7

However, for Germany and the UK the under-predictions in 1970 are again significant.

Both Nordhaus and Maynard and van Ryckeghem on the other hand predict price and wage developments in the USA through 1970 rather well using this type of model:

TABLE 9.3: *Inflation-rate predictions*

	1968 actual/predicted	1969 actual/predicted	1970 actual/predicted
M. and van R. (price inflation)	— —	4.9 3.8	4.7 4.1
Prediction Errors			
Nordhaus (wage inflation)	0.8	-0.2	-0.7

So far, then, it appears that the standard monetarist/Keynesian view of the wage/price inflation process holds less well in Western Europe than in the USA; and that in particular the model does not cope with the wage and price acceleration in Europe in the late 1960s.

The distinction between the monetarist and Keynesian views of the inflationary process lies in large part in the determinants of unemployment; this will be discussed when transmission mechanisms are examined. Before that a third theory of inflation, the Scandinavian theory, must be considered. According to this theory wages in the export and import competing sectors of an economy are so determined as to maintain a constant profit margin in those sectors; in so far as prices there are effectively fixed by prices in world markets, constant profit margins imply that the rate of wage inflation in those sectors is equal to the rate of inflation of world market prices plus its sectoral growth of labour productivity. The theory does not explain satisfactorily why profit margins should remain constant, but it could be attributed to union bargaining behaviour; this latter is equally responsible for keeping wages in the non-trading - so called 'sheltered' - sectors in line with, or in constant proportion to, wages in the trading sectors. To test this theory the rate of wage inflation can be compared to the rates of inflation of export and import prices. In an important recent empirical article Perry (1975) has developed a model in which these variables are added to the monetarist/Keynesian variables in an attempt to test both approaches together. He concludes that a combined

model is appropriate for Germany, Italy, and the UK, though not for France. But while his approach models the period up to the late 1960s more persuasively than Maynard and van Ryckeghem or Nordhaus:

several of the equations fail to predict well the most glaring fact about this period: the abrupt accelerations that took place between 1968 and 1970 . . . The question is why wages accelerated the way they did and when they did. In France and the UK unemployment had been rising through the year of the explosions. In the other countries noted, unemployment was falling and relatively low in the year of the explosions. But in no country was unemployment lower than it had been in previous boom periods. The possibility that economies crossed a new threshold in labour tightness does not seem acceptable. Nor was there any unusual burst of price inflation preceding the wage explosions. If economic variables were important, it must have been through some cumulative effect that they finally caused the acceleration in wage inflation. (*ibid*)

(Perry goes on to argue that the previous history of the distribution of income is of importance: this dovetails with the explanation developed on pages 231 ff).

We have seen so far that the standard theories of inflation do not account for the upsurge in wage and price inflation in Europe in the late 1960s. Thus a necessary condition of the American argument does not hold. For completeness the second leg of the international transmission mechanisms should be briefly enumerated: the ways in which the explanatory variables of the domestic inflation model are determined externally.

The level of unemployment is influenced by different external factors in the Keynesian and monetarist models. In the monetarist model the level of unemployment is largely determined by the growth rate of the money supply relative to the current rate of inflation. For in that case it is argued that expenditure increases in real terms, so that excess demand rises in the product market and unemployment falls in the labour market. (In turn, *via* the theory discussed above, price and wage inflation increase until they are equal to the new rate of growth of the money supply, so that the theory of inflation is indeed monetarist.) The growth rate of the money supply can have domestic or external origins. If a country runs a balance of payments surplus, that is equivalent to an increase in the money supply, since the balance of payments surplus is the difference between receipts from and payments to the rest of the world. Thus the transmission of inflation takes the following course: B is inflating faster than A, B's international competitive position steadily worsens until at some point B runs a deficit against A, the money supply rises in A, A's inflation rates starts to accelerate and the process continues until A's inflation rate is equal to that of B's. There is at least one theoretical and one empirical problem in applying this argument to our cases. The theoretical problem is that the government in A has some control over the money supply itself and can to some extent neutralise inflows of money from abroad if it so wishes. The

empirical problem is that the USA only ran a large deficit against most European countries in 1970, i.e. *after* the inflationary wage settlements in France (June 1968), Italy (December 1969), and Germany (September 1969). This empirical problem also vitiates the standard Keynesian transmission mechanism. The level of total expenditure in the Keynesian theory, and hence the level of unemployment, is determined by certain components of expenditure which are treated as effectively exogenous: the most important of these are fixed investment expenditures, government expenditures, and the balance of exports over imports. It is *via* this last component that the traditional Keynesian transmission mechanism operates.

If neither of these mechanisms were much in evidence, a more sophisticated Keynesian/monetarist view is that governments in the countries in question had as policy goals a maximum rate of expansion of the domestic economy consistent with balance of payments equilibrium.<sup>4</sup> Hence, if the German government observed the American expansion and its growing demand for European exports, a German expansion (whether by monetary or fiscal means) could be initiated without worsening the German balance of payments; while in the absence of such a growth in export demand, the growth in imports to Germany implied by an expansion of the German economy would have led to a worsening balance of payments. For this view there is some evidence in the case of Italy and Germany. There is little evidence in the case of the UK and France. In both latter countries the governments were concerned, if anything, to avoid increasing demand in the relevant periods.

An alternative type of mechanism of transmission of inflation is suggested by the Scandinavian theory. This emphasises the direct effect of foreign price inflation. Prices in the export and import-competing sectors of the economy are determined or at any rate strongly influenced directly by world prices. There is considerable evidence that this occurred throughout the relevant period, and that US inflation was an important influence in this way on European inflation. However, as Perry has shown, the price movements are unable to account for more than a small proportion of the wage increases in the late 1960s.

## THE RISE IN INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT: THE AMERICAN EXPLANATION.

The explanation of the rise in industrial conflict has been of concern to orthodox, primarily British, economists. Strikes are according to their view epiphenomenal: they are a consequence of the world-wide inflation rather than a cause. This is put rather clearly by Ward and Zis (1974):

[it is] a model in which the rate of [wage and price] inflation is determined by excess demand and the expected rate of increase of prices . . . If the actual rate of inflation was correctly anticipated, then real incomes would rise in line with the expectations of the recipients. However, such an

'equilibrium rate of inflation' is not a permanent feature of the world. Laidler argues that it is a characteristic of disequilibrium inflation, i.e., when the actual rate of inflation is larger than that expected, that money income increases will be eroded by price increases, and that people will attempt to realise the real income increases which they have been denied. This attempt can result in social unrest. In other words, according to this model, the industrial unrest that most advanced countries have experienced in recent years is the consequence and not the cause of inflation. If inflation rates are determined by excess demand and the expected rate of price inflation, it follows then that countries' experiences will be similar if they are interdependent through a system of fixed exchange rates . . . Briefly, then, the one side in the debate regards inflation as an international rather than a national phenomenon, determined by excess demand and the expected rate of price inflation, and as the cause rather than the consequence of trade union militancy.

Thus the main plus-point analytically of the argument, that it satisfies the methodological requirements of explaining both the synchronicity of the strike waves (through its being an international argument) and the concomitant acceleration of inflation (by providing a causal link between a theory of inflation and a theory of industrial conflict), is invalidated by its empirical weaknesses: the lack of strong evidence behind the international transmission mechanisms, and the failure of the associated theory of inflation. With such a theory two problems have already been encountered. First, the evidence for international transmission of inflationary expectations and excess demand is weak for the UK and France, and not wholly convincing for Italy and Germany. And second, the wage inflation which occurred, in the relevant years, was markedly in excess of what would be predicted by theories in which inflation is 'determined by excess demand and its expected rate of increase of prices'.

In any case the implied explanation of industrial conflict does not accord with the facts. It is required, for the explanation, that industrial conflict occurs when the actual rate of inflation exceeds the expected rate of inflation.

The theory underlying the expected rate of inflation was briefly stated above. The expected rate will be adjusted by some proportion of the difference between the actual rate and the expected rate. If, for instance, the inflation rate is 10 per cent this year, while it was expected that it would be 6 per cent, expected inflation next year will be 6 per cent plus some proportion of the difference between 10 per cent and 6 per cent. This is known as the theory of 'adaptive expectations'. It carries the implication that, from a period in which expectations were correct, the actual rate will only exceed the expected rate if the actual rate is increasing. Thus in the period preceding the industrial conflict the orthodox explanation requires an increase in the rate of price inflation; and since the rise in industrial conflict was unprecedentedly large the increase in price inflation would have had to have been particularly high. But, to repeat the quotation from Perry above, there was no 'unusual

burst of price inflation preceeding the wage explosions', and the wage explosions occurred more or less simultaneously with the strike waves.

In addition, this type of explanation of the strike waves can say nothing about the unofficial form which they took.

The main purpose of Ward and Zis's paper is to show that the 'alternative view' of the rise in industrial conflict as a cause of inflation is untenable. In this view, the acceleration of inflation was caused by an increase in worker militancy: the militancy accelerated wage inflation as large settlements were necessary to end the strikes and the wage inflation in turn provoked the price inflation. This approach is consistent with two important pieces of evidence: (1) that the price inflation did not precede the wage inflation and the strikes; and (2) that the acceleration of wage inflation was historically associated with the settlements of the strikes. Ward and Zis criticise the argument directly on two counts.

The first criticism is statistical and occupies the bulk of their article. Suppose it is true that increases in militancy increase wage inflation; then, they argue, past statistics should show wage inflation positively related to militancy, when other factors generating wage inflation (particularly the degree of labour market tightness and the rate of expected price increases) have been taken into account. They use as a measure of militancy the level of strike activity, and show by regression analysis that, except for Italy, no positive relationship between militancy and wage inflation exists when unemployment and expected price inflation are taken into account.

The refutation of this hypothesis, however, bears little on the argument they are concerned to refute, that increases in worker militancy lead to high wage inflation. Their mistake is to conflate worker militancy with strike activity. At a simple level strike activity is either a reflection of a rise in worker militancy or a rise in employer or government militancy - together with a belief, in some form, on the other side that the increased militancy should be resisted either because its strength is not correctly perceived or because the cost of concession is greater than the expected cost of resistance. So increased worker militancy is neither a necessary condition for increased strike activity (employer/governmental militancy may have increased), nor a sufficient condition (employers may find it less costly to concede without a strike). Ward and Zis analyse data over the period 1956-71; in particular, governmental intervention in 1970 and 1971 to attempt to reduce the rate of wage inflation resulted in substantial strike activity.

The next section of this paper answers Ward and Zis's second criticism: no explanations of the rise in worker militancy have been given which account for its appearance in a number of countries at the same period of time.

## BOOM AND RECESSION, CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE: THE EUROPEAN ECONOMY IN THE 1960s

The view that the rise in industrial conflict and the presumptively consequent

acceleration of wage inflation was the reflection of an increase in worker militancy has to face the compelling criticism: no persuasive candidate explanation has been forthcoming as to why the increase in militancy should have occurred in a number of European countries at roughly the same point in time. Such an explanation must also account for the contrast of transatlantic developments, and the reasons why the strike waves were primarily unofficial. Further, two factors recur as partial explanations of the rise in conflict: some form of prior wage restraint at the national level, and on the shop-floor attempts at rationalisation of work practices and reductions of plant-level wage supplements. The purpose of this section is to sketch out, at some length, an explanation of the rise in worker militancy which meets these requirements.

The attempts which have been made to explain the rise in industrial conflict as the result of some general tendency fall foul, as sufficient explanations, of one or other of the above requirements. Thus the view that the events were the long-term consequence of a prolonged period of full employment explains neither timing nor location nor form. The same is true of the related arguments which look to a secular loosening of institutional sanctions throughout society, and see the rise in industrial conflict as a particular manifestation of the process. There are similar problems with a co-optation theory which sees the conflict as the simple consequence of a trend towards the increasing co-optation of (in particular) trade unions and working-class political parties. This does not deny these arguments an important role. It is difficult to imagine widespread industrial unrest except in periods of broadly full employment; certainly it is an implicit assumption of this essay that broad full employment was a necessary condition for the increase in industrial conflict. Equally important has been the role of co-optation, but that should not be seen only as an exogenous trend. In Germany, Italy and the UK – less so in France – the economic developments of the 1960s led to growing co-optation. This emerges in the analysis which follows.

## THE BOOM: LATE FIFTIES TO MID-SIXTIES

The argument of this section reaches back to the late 1950s. The most marked feature in the post-war development of the large Continental European countries was the sustained and rapid growth of output and trade from the middle to late 1950s to the mid-1960s. This brought in its train exceptionally high demand pressures, and by 1962 or 1963 rapid wage inflation. The post-war demand pattern of the US economy was significantly different. From the high demand levels in the USA associated at the start of the 1950s with the Korean War, unemployment rose to a high point by the end of the decade. Through the 1960s unemployment fell: first slowly, and then more quickly under the impact of the 1964 tax cut, the Vietnam War and Johnson's Great Society programme of social expenditure. The US economy exhibited throughout this period a close inverse relationship between inflation and

unemployment. The first half of the 1960s therefore saw a low (though slowly rising) rate of inflation in the USA; and, given the strong influence of US inflation on the rate of inflation of prices of internationally traded goods ('world prices'), this was reflected in a low rate of inflation of world prices.

*Summary:* this is a convenient point to summarise the argument of this section. The combination of circumstances just described had two direct consequences for the European economies: growing balance-of-payments difficulties, and a reduction in the share of profits. The governments of Italy, France, Germany and – less directly – the UK reacted in that order between 1963 and 1966 to the inflation and balance-of-payments difficulties, using a combination of sharp deflation and more direct institutional intervention to control the growth of wages and prices and to correct balance-of-payments disequilibrium. The first root of the strike waves was this intervention (formal or otherwise) of the mid-1960s, through its effects in moderating real wage increases and upsetting differentials while allowing profitability growth and tying in unions to long-term contracts. The second root was made possible by the deflationary policies. This was the employers' response to the reduction of profitability which had occurred in the tight labour markets and rapidly expanding trade penetration of the early 1960s. During the boom tight labour markets strengthened shop-floor organisation and made cost-cutting difficult. In the looser labour markets of the mid-1960s employers attempted to reduce unit labour costs. This was achieved through rationalisation of work practices; through changing what were regarded as inflationary plant-level payments systems; and by direct reductions of plant-determined wage supplements.

The third contributory root is the rise in the US inflation rate and hence that of world prices from the mid-1960s. This enabled European business to translate the cost reductions, at least partially, into higher profit margins as opposed to lower prices. Thus, together with the other two roots, profit margins were able to rise and the growth of real wages to be moderated.

These roots broke through into the industrial unrest of the late 1960s and thus explain the broad coincidence in timing. In Germany and Italy the process required the complement of an economic upswing. In both countries this was in part domestically induced and in part a consequence of the US boom. In France and the UK the industrial unrest was a response to the same roots, but in neither case was the intermediation of boom conditions necessary. Instead, in very different ways, the institutional structure was dynamically sufficient.

The first two roots account in addition for the unofficial form taken by the strike waves. The conflict was, in very general terms, the reaction, first, to institutional intervention in the wage-setting process with its co-option of national unions; and second, to the employers' offensive at the plant level on work practices and wage drift against which national unions, typically weak at that level, were unable to organise. An analysis on a country basis will be necessary to give the right balance and sense in detail to these general

remarks. Finally, the wage explosions are seen as consequences of the problems: the additional payment, as it were, for compensation –

### THE BOOM: INFLATION, EXTERNAL DISEQUILIBRIUM AND DECLINING PROFITABILITY

The European boom of the early 1960s produced a rapid rate of domestic wage and price inflation; accompanied, because of the high US unemployment, by a significantly more restrained growth of world prices. From this stemmed balance-of-payments problems and declining profitability. Balance-of-payments difficulties hit first Italy (most severely in 1963), then France (in 1964–5), Germany (1965–6) and the UK (1966). There were two distinct causes of these difficulties. First, the direct consequences of the European boom in a world economy suffering from the US recession: growing uncompetitiveness of European prices and a more rapid growth rate of incomes relative to those in other countries implying a more rapid growth rate of imports than exports. To these direct consequences were added the cumulating impact of the deflationary policies of neighbouring economies. If Italy, with the worst problems of domestic inflation and overheating, reacted the first to external disequilibrium, its sharp deflation in 1964–6 threw additional pressure on the French balance of payments; in turn and in addition the subsequent French deflation put pressure on Germany and to some extent the UK. Not only was it a case of a house of cards falling down; once fallen, no card found it easy to stand up on its own. In discussing French difficulties in 1966, Kindleberger argued (1967):

Stabilisation, growth and planning were all rendered complex in the European Common Market by the fact that other countries, and notably Germany and Italy, came to the end of their super-growth about the same time. With the change came an end to the illusion that the business cycle was a thing of the past. The Italian depression of 1964 hurt French exports, income and expansion, and likewise did the German recession of 1965–6.

There is less agreement on the causes of the decline in the share of profits which occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s in most Western European countries, but not in the USA.

In this chapter significance is attached to the movements of the share of profits; generally, at least as a tool of recent economic history, such movements have been ignored by economists. However, in 1971 Ulman and Flanagan emphasised their importance in relation to incomes policies (to which we shall return). And in 1972 Glyn and Sutcliffe took the share of profits as the central concept in an analysis of the dynamics of capitalist development:

Our argument . . . is that British capitalism has suffered such a dramatic decline in profitability that it is now literally fighting for survival. This crisis

has developed because mounting demands from the working class for a faster growth in living standards has coincided with growing competition between capitalist countries . . . it has intensified because the other rich countries have been subject to the same pressures from the working class as British capitalism. (1972: 10)

Glyn and Sutcliffe's concern was to show why, under rather general conditions (broad full employment and relatively free trade), there will be a long-run tendency for the share of profits to fall; and what the responses of employers and government to this may be expected to be. These responses will be discussed below; here, the problem is to explain why for a number of European countries the share of profits fell in the early 1960s, and why a similar phenomenon was absent in the USA.

For this there are a number of explanations. The Glyn-Sutcliffe argument as to why the share of profits should fall is that, in effect, wage inflation will be more rapid than the price inflation allowed by world prices. Why that should be so in general is not clear. But if there are difficulties about a general explanation, a specific analysis of the early 1960s in these terms is much easier. For then US unemployment implied a low growth rate of world prices, while the boom in Continental Europe implied a high rate of European wage inflation. Thus a falling share of profits in Europe in the early 1960s is consistent on this explanation with an unchanging share in the USA.

There is a second explanation, compatible with the first, and also consistent with the facts of the early 1960s. The Glyn-Sutcliffe explanation (at least in its specific application here) rests on the tightness in labour markets produced by the trade-growth boom in Europe. The other central aspect of the boom was the development of trade. The first two decades of the post-war period were marked, for the major Continental countries, by an enormous expansion of imports and exports. (In the inter-war period France had subsisted behind high tariff walls, in a political compromise of small entrepreneurs, *petits commerçants* and agriculture; the German and, to a lesser extent, Italian economies were organised under fascist regimes on semi-autarchic lines.) The growth of trade in the European countries was particularly marked in the trade-growth boom. There were two reasons for this: first, the boom was greatly stimulated by the progressive reduction in tariffs from the late 1950s onwards as a result of the establishment of the European Economic Community; and second, in turn, the development of trade was greatly stimulated by the boom, since it afforded rapidly growing markets for exports.

This development of trade affected profitability in two ways. First the reduction of tariffs directly lowered the price of imports. Thus if domestically-produced import-competing goods were to remain competitive their prices had to fall, implying a reduction either in costs per unit or in profits per unit. In neo-classical theory, a world of perfect competition in which producers cannot earn monopolistic or oligopolistic profits ensures that it is unit costs which bear the brunt of the adjustment: the demand for those types of labour or other primary factors used intensively in the import-competing sector will

fall until (through the operation of competitive factor markets) the reduction in unit costs has been brought about. In a world of monopolies and oligopolies a fall in the profit margin will also result, particularly if labour markets are unionised and unions maintain differentials between different types of labour.

In the second place profitability may fall, given the level of tariffs, as the share of a market held by imports reaches a certain level. Domestic producers will start to trim their profit margins, in response to foreign competition, only when the import share of the market can be felt.

Both these latter explanations are consistent with profitability falling in Europe during the boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s, while remaining static in the USA. For while US tariffs were reduced during this period as a result of the Dillon round of trade negotiations under the auspices of GATT they were small reductions compared to the EEC reductions; and the share of imports was both small at the start and did not rise significantly during this period. (In this context, one may conjecture that the very substantial reductions in tariffs brought about by the Kennedy round were a contributory factor to the falling shares of profits in many countries in the early 1970s.)

So far the UK has not been discussed. Broadly similar factors account for the decline in profitability in the first half of the 1960s and balance-of-payments problems in the mid-1960s. Both were partly the consequence of UK wage inflation significantly in excess of the low inflation of world prices imposed by the low US inflation rate. And the UK balance of payments disequilibrium in 1966 and 1967 was in addition a reflection of the deflationary policies of the major continental countries. But the relatively high wage inflation in the UK was the consequence of longer-term factors than the European boom: first, of the low unemployment maintained by successive post-war governments up to 1966; and second, of the strength of the trade union movement.

## RECESSION: GOVERNMENT AND EMPLOYER RESPONSES

In this sub-section the three areas of response – deflation, incomes restraint and rationalisation – that occupied the mid-1960s are in turn discussed; along with the way on which the latter two responses, together with the developments of world prices, created the precipitating conditions of the strike waves.

Deflation can be dealt with rather briefly. Italy was the first country to deflate. The deflation was engineered primarily by the Bank of Italy through restrictive monetary policies initiated in 1963. The OECD (1969) described the consequent ‘recession of 1964–5 [as] the most important in post-war years’, continuing that the economy had not by early 1969 ‘regained previous levels of capacity utilisation’. Unemployment rose from a low of 2.7 per cent to 4.3 per cent in 1966, falling slowly to 3.7 per cent in 1969 (though the latter figure may be an overestimate of ‘economic’ unemployment because of the effects of the 1969 strikes). In France deflationary measures were taken

initially in 1963 as part of Debré's Stabilisation Plan; unemployment rose slowly from 1.4 per cent in each of the three years 1961, 1962 and 1963 to 1.8 per cent in 1965 and 1966, 2.3 per cent in 1967 and 2.7 per cent in 1968. The German recession, in relative terms, was considerably sharper than the French. The first measures were taken in the monetary field by the *Bundesbank* in 1965; mid-1966 saw the numbers of unemployed rise above vacancies for the first time since 1959, and in 1967 and 1968 the unemployment rate rose to 1.0 per cent and 1.2 per cent after six years at or below 0.5 per cent. In 1969 the rate fell back again to 0.8 per cent and in 1970 to 0.5 per cent. In the UK the Labour government put together in the July measures of 1966 a deflationary package which pushed up unemployment from 2.4 per cent in 1966 (it was 2.3 per cent in 1965 and 2.6 per cent in 1964) to 3.8 per cent in 1967, 3.7 per cent in 1968 and 1969 and 4.0 per cent in 1970.

In each case these deflations were accompanied by government attempts at income restraint through institutional intervention. The French Government initially attempted in 1964 to secure the co-operation of the unions. The attempt resulted in the *dialogue des muettes*. The unions were too ineffective for the Government to pay a high price for their co-operation; but a high price was a necessary compensation for the manifest disadvantages of entanglement in a Gaullist incomes policy. The Government instead imposed on the public sector the *Toutée* procedure (1964) for determining wages: the Government decided the overall allowable increase in wages, leaving only the form the increase took to management-union negotiation. From 1964 to 1967 the policy effectively restrained wage increases in the public sector, as can be seen in the following figures calculated by Mitchell (1972: 321); the administrative sector consists wholly of public employees and the commercial sector largely of private employees:

TABLE 9.4: *Annual percentage wage increases (France)*

	<i>Administrative Sector</i>	<i>Commercial Sector</i>
1960	6.7	8.5
1961	8.7	9.8
1962	17.0	10.8
1963	14.6	11.1
1964	4.5	9.2
1965	3.8	6.4
1966	4.8	6.6
1967	4.9	6.1
1968	12.5	11.1

If the private sector is not similarly restrained 'pressure builds up for a quantum jump in lagging public wages and salaries; . . . during the French

wage explosion of 1968, the greatest wage increases tended to be concentrated among groups of public employees whose wages had previously been subject to the most determined governmental restraint' (Ulman and Flanagan, 1971). Another pointer is the concentration of the early strikes in May 1968 in the public sector (Goldey 1970).

In Germany, the unions co-operated in the incomes policy, the *konzertierte Aktion* programme, initiated when the SPD entered the Government in 1966, for at least three reasons: concern with the employment consequences of continuing inflation; desire to maintain the SPD in office; and (perhaps) a longer-term fear for their legal position if they refused. Their participation brought low wage increases and agreements for periods above the usual twelve months. The policy was posited upon the promise of 'social symmetry' between profits and wages. But as Muller-Jentsch and Sperling argue in their paper in the companion volume, the promise of social symmetry has not been kept. Wildcat strikes broke out in the autumn of 1969, enforcing a revision of the unions' wage restraint policy.

The Italian case is less clear. Ulman and Flanagan (1971) argue that 'notwithstanding the unions' reluctance to commit themselves to a formal incomes policy, the Government was able to induce the unions to postpone the reopening of their contracts in 1965.' The key contract was the Metalworkers Agreement. When it was finally signed, in late 1966, some observers saw evidence of restraint on the part of the unions. The wage increase was 5 per cent spread over three years. Sylos Labini attributed 'the deliberately moderate policies followed by the Trade Unions . . . to their appreciation, after the 1964 experience, of the negative effects on investment and employment of an excessive increase in wages' (quoted in *ibid*). Bargaining deadlock had developed in the negotiations between the employers and the metal-working union federations; Giugni (1971) argues that government pressure led to a settlement between the employers and the more moderate union confederations. There was also pressure on the CGIL from the Communist Party (Blackmer 1968: 270-4). Moreover the Metalworkers Agreement was a three-year contract, as were the other major contracts signed then or in 1967. As in Germany the rising profits allowed by these low wage increases in a context of more rapidly increasing world prices was a factor of importance in the strikes of 1968 and 1969.

The UK evidence is more clear-cut. The Labour Government instituted a statutory incomes policy in July 1966. From then until mid-1967 it operated to limit sharply wage increases; in the first six months wages were frozen and in the second there was 'severe restraint'. The policy was still operative in the period from mid-1967 to late 1969, though relaxed. Late 1969 saw the effective end of the policy, as the Government allowed substantial increases in the public sector. These periods correspond crudely to what happened to the number of strikes. The second half of 1966 saw a low level of strikes compared to the previous six months; there was some increase in the first half of 1967, and from then the level rose until late 1969; there was then a big increase and a new high level persisted throughout 1970. There is a number of problems

with this. It neglects movements in unemployment: the deflation in 1966 may have been responsible for the decline in strikes at that stage, though unemployment rose over the whole period and so could not account for the later increase in strikes. And second, there was an acceleration in late 1968 in the number of strikes which is not accounted for. However, a tentative interpretation is the following. During the first year of statutory incomes policy it was widely believed that there was little chance of securing wage increases by striking because of the determined attitude of the Government. In the next phase, i.e. mid-1967 to late 1969, the government was forced to ease its position somewhat, for several reasons: the distortion of traditional differentials over a 12-month period as a result of: the freeze on all wage negotiations in July 1966; the aggravation caused by the rise of earnings above rates in certain sectors; and the increasing hostility of the unions, on account of the suspension of free collective bargaining and the growing unemployment. During this phase the Government still maintained a tighter control on the public sector; the growth of strikes was probably concentrated at plant level in the private sector as workers attempted to regain differentials (and boost real wages hit by devaluation, see *infra*). The third phase, starting in late 1969, was spearheaded by public-sector strikes accompanied by a new higher level of wage settlements, the consequences of low real wage increases and distorted public/private sector differentials for up to a three-year period.

The other explanations of the strike waves stem from the strategies adopted by employers during the mid-1960s recession. Before turning to discuss them, two other government approaches to the balance-of-payments problem must be briefly mentioned. Devaluation was employed by the Labour government in Britain (in November 1967); the direct purpose of this was to increase UK competitiveness by altering relative prices of exports and imports, but it also permitted some increase in profitability and imposed a cut on real wages. And both British and French governments, loath to reduce too severely public-expenditure programmes to which they were committed, sought the resources for balance of payments correction from consumption through increases in taxation or social-security payments.

It is difficult in this type of broad economic history to pin down carefully the appropriate empirical facts. In the preceding discussion of government policies this problem has been obvious; but it is in the area of employers' responses that evidence becomes particularly impressionistic.

Ideally three points should be established about the employers' responses: first, that they were the response to declining profitability consequent upon international competition; next, that they occurred during the mid-sixties recession; and finally, that they were a factor in the strike waves. Much more research than has been done would be necessary to establish these points; the type of evidence quoted here is at best suggestive, and not meant to be complete.

The paper on France in the companion volume emphasises the role of mergers in the process of rationalisation, in part reflecting the previous low level of concentration (page 57). The argument does not exemplify

completely the three points above: in fact, the share of profits fell most sharply in France between 1960 and 1965, and it was in that period that international trade grew most rapidly. It seems plausible that the recession was a facilitating factor in preventing serious labour unrest during the subsequent period of structural transformation.

In Germany the most visible form of employer response was in cuts in plant-level wage supplements (see the paper in the companion volume, page 265). In a discussion of Italian experience based on a number of factory studies Bianchi *et al* (1970) concluded:

by 1966 companies had begun to reestablish profitability by policies aimed at increasing productivity. The means most frequently employed was an increase in the pace of work unaccompanied in general by an equi-proportional increase in earnings. The same pattern was observed in almost all the factories studied.

Productivity growth may be induced by high rates of capital formation, but from 1964 investment was at a low level, so that the brunt of the the burden of the increase in productivity was likely to have been borne by workers. To achieve these increases, the recession starting in 1964 was accompanied by attempts on the part of employers to break the union strength which had been built up in the boom at plant level. And the importance of the grievances built up over working conditions were reflected in the demands pursued during 1969 (see paper in the companion volume, page 129).

In the UK, as in France, there was a merger boom, reaching a peak in 1968-70. 'The merger boom . . . reflected the need for larger firms as international competition stiffened, and our analysis of mergers industry by industry suggests that they have been most common in industries particularly exposed to foreign competition - electrical engineering, vehicles, shipbuilding, paper, textiles' (Glyn and Sutcliffe 1972). Probably more important over this period has been the attempt by management to regain control over work practices and wage bargaining on the shop floor, controls over work practices by workers and shop stewards having gradually developed throughout the post-war period (see paper in the companion volume, page 215). In some respects the employers had considerable success. In a study of earnings by workers covered by the 36 major national agreements Elliot and Steele (1976) showed that between 1968 and 1970 an increase in the proportion of earnings coming from payment by results was recorded in only one group of workers (out of 36). It is in vehicles in particular that strong attempts appear to have been made in this and other directions to regain control of the shop floor; this reflects in the number of important strikes in motor manufacturing over this period.

In each of four countries, employers adopted policies of rationalisation at plant or company level, while governments adopted incomes policies. These policies translated into four "frustration factors" in the period prior to the strikes: moderation of growth of real wages, reduction in labour's share and

increase in the share of profits, erosion of differentials, and increased work load. As pointed out in the summary (page 233) the translation is not immediate in the case of the two “frustration factors”. The incomes policy and rationalisation directly moderate money wage increases and unit labour costs in money terms. The moderation in money terms will not be reflected in a moderation in real wage terms, or a movement of the share of incomes towards profits, if the reduced unit labour costs are passed on to the consumer in the form of reduced prices. What is suggested in this chapter is that world prices are important determinants of domestic prices; world prices were rising at this stage because of the US inflation; and hence the moderation of money wage and unit labour cost increases translated into real wage moderation and increases in the share of profits. Thus US inflation was a necessary condition for the development of the first two of the frustration factors, though of course not sufficient.

### THE STRIKE WAVES: TIMING AND UNOFFICIAL NATURE

To both the questions of the timing and of the unofficial nature of the strikes, general answers have been given. The strikes occurred in the broad period they did because they were the delayed reaction to the policies pursued by governments and employers in the recessions of the mid-sixties. And they were unofficial because, with partial national union co-optation behind the policies, they could only be opposed at the plant level, the level at which national unions (even if unco-opted) were weak or had no formal presence. In discussing in this subsection the specific form these general answers take in the different countries, there is no attempt at complete explanation: the intention is to point to some of the structural and institutional differences (themselves at least in part the reflection of the pre-existing distribution of power in the respective societies) which appear as important elements in any explanation.

The German unions were tied into long-run national contracts on wage rates they could not renegotiate. This was not accidental: the unions believed that it was important, for employment growth, to enable profits to recover. And even if, by mid 1969, profits had recovered far enough, many union leaders (especially in IG Bergbau, the mining union) did not think sensible the size of wage increases demanded during the September strikes, this being a task reserved for the *Betriebsräte*. Necessarily, therefore, action to compensate workers for low contractual wage increases – as well as to restore plant wage supplements and improve working conditions – could only be taken at the plant level by the workers themselves and their plant representatives.

Why did the timing of the September strikes require the onset of an economic upswing and tightening of the labour market? The German industrial relations system exerts strong and generally effective sanctions against unofficial conflict. It is, at least technically, illegal for works councils and *Vertrauensleute* to initiate strikes; and the unions, on whom both are partially dependent, are in general opposed to unofficial strikes. Strikers therefore have to be unusually prepared to strike and confident of the results:

they cannot rely on legal remedy or union support if dismissed or sanctioned. Thus, if union support is not forthcoming, unofficial strikes are most likely to occur in a high employment situation, since it is then that the chances of success are highest and the disadvantages of failure least.

As in Germany, the Italian unions were tied into long-term wage contracts at the national level. On the shop floor their power, in so far as it existed, lay with skilled workers in the North and workers in the public service sectors. For the most part the organization at plant level of the increasingly important semi-skilled workers was either broken in the mid-sixties recession or had never existed; and employers were generally prepared to fight moves towards their organisation while the labour market remained weak (as it did until 1968). The unions were thus unable to gain them compensation at the plant level for the deficiencies of the national contracts, or to counter the moves to rationalise production. (Also, there was concern within the majority blue-collar union confederation, the CGIL, that the other confederations might advance disproportionately in any rapid unionisation of the semi-skilled. CISL and UIL had less need to respect the rights and differentials of the skilled workers, the base of CGIL strength). This weakness of the unions among the semi-skilled at plant level explains why the strikes were in origin unofficial. It does not *per se* explain the timing – during the economic recovery – since in France, too, the unions were weak at the plant level, and the labour market was still weak in May 1968.

In this respect, there is a relevant difference between the French and Italian experience. The effects of government and employer responses in the mid-1960s were borne in Italy by semi-skilled workers, of whom a large proportion (in particular, southern immigrants to the North) had no experience of joint action over a wide range of factories, or even a clear idea of its possibility. Skilled workers in industry, and those employed in the public sector were able to exploit their bargaining position, whether through union or political strength, to avoid or minimise the effects of the responses. This was not so in France. The brunt of incomes policy fell on workers in the public sector, and that of mergers in the private sector was felt by skilled workers and technical staff as much as semi-skilled.

In Italy, with little experience or organisation among the semi-skilled, there was no widespread belief in the possibility of effective strikes, and the cost of initiating strikes – with the likelihood that few would follow – was high if it meant dismissal when the semi-skilled labour market was weak. A tighter labour market was thus a necessary condition in Italy (though not sufficient; it required as well both the example of successful strikes by skilled workers and the active force of unofficial left-wing groups within and outside the unions). In France, on the other hand, it was an older, more established workforce which was affected and one therefore with memories and traditions:

. . . most of the strikers, especially the older men in the provinces, were not suddenly applying the thoughts of Chairman Mao; they were following the standard pattern of great industrial disputes in France, with the 1936

Popular Front as a model. In 1968 (and in 1953) as in 1936, pent up frustration had exploded in a series of wildcat strikes, which quickly spread, as often as not among the unorganized as among union members (Goldey, 1970).

What was necessary then (given the beliefs imbedded in the system, the actors affected and the pent up frustration induced by successfully enforced incomes restraint and rationalisation) was a sufficiently strong signal; and this was provided by the students' revolt and the fact that the students had wrung concessions from a government which had denied them to the working class.

The differences in the beliefs embedded in the French and Italian systems, and the different groups of workers primarily affected, partially explain why a necessary condition for the Hot Autumn – a tightening of the labour market – was not also a condition for the May Events. It is however only a partial explanation. A further factor in the French case was the role of workers in the public sector who to a large extent had job security. What was surprising was, not that such workers were prepared to strike in a loose labour market, but that they were not prepared to strike earlier. The explanation as to why they were not returns the argument to the need for a signal: the 'weakness' in a weak labour movement is primarily the lack of belief in the efficacy of the strike weapon for either of the interrelated reasons that the employers will not concede or that other workers will not follow. The signal cannot (generally) come from the unions: if it could, the union movement would not be weak. Indeed, the pattern of French strike action has been that the unions have more or less automatically backed strike action. It is in this sense that the motor force behind May 1968 was unofficial. Certainly, as in Germany and Italy, the employers' responses affected workers at plant level where the national unions were weak and unable or unprepared to intervene. But French unions were not restrained, as the German and (partially) the Italian unions were, through long-term contracts, from attempting to mitigate wage moderation at the national level: they were unable to initiate action at the national level because they were too weak to do so. It is thus wrong to say that the CGT and the CFDT were opposed to the events of May 1968. The CGT was of course opposed to certain aspects of the events: workers' control does not mix with democratic centralism; and the revolutionary manifestations were an evident danger to the PCF: thus the CGT was concerned to channel "qualitative" demands into a "quantitative" form. But the bulk of the organisational work in the events came from union cadres, and there is little doubt of the enthusiasm of the union leaderships. In the British case, the strikes were unofficial because they were the response to the effects of incomes policy on real wages and differentials, and to the related effects of employer policies of rationalisation at the only level (the shop-floor) at which such response was then possible. A distinction needs to be drawn between, on the one hand, policies which sought either to change methods of work, which had become 'custom and practice' or customary payments system, or to alter differentials which had served as the basis of plant

bargaining; and on the other, policies of restraint on national wage contracts. With statutory wage controls, the latter policies could only be combated at national level by unions prepared to challenge the government's constitutional position: debatably, the NUM posed such a challenge in 1974, but most unions could not.

Against both types of policies the usual form of plant-, shop- or work-group-specific unofficial strike was a possible response in the private sector. From mid-1967 onwards, after the period of freeze and severe restraint, the Government's incomes policy was in practice applied with somewhat less rigidity outside the public sector. This was particularly true of the shop-floor in the private sector, which could only be tightly policed for short periods of time.

The unofficial nature of the strikes took two forms. The bulk of the great increase in the number of unofficial strikes in 1968 and 1969 was accounted for by an increase in unofficial plant-level disputes, i.e., led and organised by shop stewards. They were at the plant level in part because (as in other countries) that was the level at which the employers' responses were directed; and in part because it was the weakest point, outside the public sector, at which the effects of incomes policy could be countered. But these strikes were not unofficial in the same sense as were those on the continent. They were unofficial in that they were not run or initiated by national union officers. But in the British system, the so-called "unofficial" shop-floor organisation of workers is an integral part of union organisation, and it is proper to treat the rise in plant-level disputes as an institutional response to rationalisation and incomes policy.

The second type of unofficial action was in the public-sector strikes and negotiations in late 1969. Then, in the case of the dustmen, miners, firemen and teachers, official union settlements were not endorsed by the rank-and-file. This was a new development, not part of the way in which the system had previously worked. And this stemmed from the compression of public-sector earnings (which the incomes policy could police) in comparison with private earnings (which it could not). The main reason why the first manifestation of shop-floor militancy could be successfully conducted in a period of high unemployment was the degree of shop-floor power in the private sector in the UK system. And the reason for the second is partially the degree of shop-floor power in the public sector (though this is weaker than in the private sector) and partially the high degree of job security then prevailing in the public sector.

In each country the main bargains which heralded the wage explosions occurred as the settlements of the strike waves. In France the Grenelle agreements of May/June 1968; in Italy the December 1969 Metal Working agreements; in Germany the agreements, primarily between IG Metall and the Iron and Steel producers, in mid September 1969; and, slightly less clearly, the public sector settlements in the UK at the end of 1969. In each case the settlement was designed to bring the strike wave to an end. And the interpretation, in economic terms, of the high level of wage increases

conceded is that they were necessary to compensate for the "frustration" factors discussed above, and to enable control to return to the unions.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to show how the usual factors which economists take as the important explanatory variables of wage inflation rates, and derivatively of industrial conflict – namely the tightness of the labour market and the expected rate of price inflation – cannot explain the wage explosions and the strike waves of the late 1960s. Instead the focus is on explaining the common cause of a number of other factors: these may loosely be called frustration factors and they have been seen by many observers as directly contributing to a greater or lesser extent to the strike waves in each of the countries. These factors came into operation in the three to four year period prior to the strikes: they are (1) moderation of real wage growth, with complementary reduction in labour's share and increase in the share of profits; (2) compression of differentials between skilled and semi-skilled workers *and/or* public and private sectors *and/or* different industries, and (3) rationalisation of production, via mergers *and/or* increasing work loads *and/or* disadvantageous changes in plant payment structures. The common cause of these "frustration" factors is traced back to the rapid growth and interpenetration of trade and the economic boom of Europe in the late 50s and early 60s. The link is the governmental and business responses to the main problems caused by the growth and trade boom – inflation and declining profitability. The governmental responses were intervention in the wage setting process (either formally through incomes policies or less formally) and deflation of demand; and the employer responses, made possible by labour market weakness as a result of these deflations, took the form of rationalisation at plant or company level (through mergers, changing payment systems, plant closures or workplace increases).

In this explanation the American boom from the mid-1960s on does not have its usual role. It caused world prices to rise in the late 1960s, but by nothing like the amount needed to explain the strikes alone (see pages 223–31). However the fact that world prices were rising enabled the money wage moderation and productivity increases through rationalisation – the results of government and employer responses in Europe – to be translated by European employers into rising profitability, and hence a moderation of real wages. This fulfilment of this necessary but not sufficient condition, it is argued, is the real importance of the US boom. Only taken into account with the developments in Europe described on pages 231–44 (the other necessary condition), do the two necessary conditions become sufficient.

A second argument of this chapter is that the orthodox economic explanation of the wage explosions and strike waves fails to explain why the waves were unofficial. Here it is argued that they were unofficial because unions were tied into long-term contracts or incomes policies at the national

level, and thus could not combat the governmental response of the mid-60s; and at the plant level at which the employer response was felt, the unions were too weak to respond. This argument requires a somewhat different interpretation in each country, and on pages 241–5 it was shown that these differences were the reaction to similar economic changes of different institutional systems; the fact that the strikes in France and the UK took place in loose labour markets, unlike those in Germany and Italy, is similarly explained.

Finally the size of the wage explosions, considerably greater than could be accounted for by conventional economic factors, is, in the loosest terms, seen as the satisfaction of the need to compensate for the 'frustration factors' and enable the unions to regain control of the situation, a desire common to governments and employers as well as unions.

There are many gaps in this analysis, which need to be filled; and I will merely mention the three which I regard as the most important.

- (1) There is no serious statistical analysis of the positive arguments put forward, while – rather unfairly – statistical arguments are partly used to refute the orthodox explanation.
- (2) Important shifts leftwards, hardly mentioned here, took place in the union movements in each of the countries. The CFDT, CISL and CGIL are most obvious examples, but it is true too of the important British unions, and has reflections in IG Metall and even the CGT. What role those changes had in the strike waves of the late 1960s is an important area of investigation (even if the more interesting effect of the changes is in the responses to the strike waves).
- (3) Finally, on a theoretical level, there is no bridge of rational behaviour provided between the frustration factors and the strikes, and this reflects a deficiency of the theory of games.

#### NOTES

1. I am particularly indebted to Alessandro Pizzorno, Lloyd Ulman, Andrew Glyn, David Goldey and Colin Crouch. I have also had helpful discussions with Bianca Becalli, Sabine Erbes-Seguin, Jean Floud, Margaret Paul and Michele Salvati.
2. This paper concentrates on France, Italy, the United Kingdom and West Germany.
3. This assumes a zero rate of growth of productivity: a positive growth rate implies an equal growth rate of the expected real wage.
4. I am indebted to Professor W. M. Corden for this suggestion.

# 10 *Urban Protest in Western Europe*

EDDY CHERKI, DOMINIQUE MEHL  
AND ANNE-MARIE METAÏLLE

There is nothing novel about demands being pressed and action and organised conflict being undertaken on issues of housing, transport facilities and general urban amenities in Western European countries. Indeed the history of the working class of Europe has been marked by repeated conflicts of this nature.

However, for some years conflict over urban questions has been stepped up, permanent bodies formed especially to tackle urban issues have consolidated their organisation, and protest has widened to cover all areas of urban activities. What is more, such conflict no longer occurs just sporadically over, say, working-class housing facilities or urban transport. A newly-established permanent front now exists outside the work-place situation and aims at disputing the way in which affairs are organised and controlled in the places where men live together. A movement is also under way among certain levels of society which, up until now, have not been given to protest, and it is within such groups that the framework of living conditions is called into question. In certain countries these movements have acquired sufficient force and scope to provide repercussions on the political scene.

The increase in urban struggles is not simply a phenomenon that is linked to prevailing conditions. It comes at a precise stage in the development of advanced capitalism that is characterised by an unprecedented expansion of consumerism and an overwhelming intervention by the state in the area of consumption. The phenomenon of urban struggles also arises at a time when the capitalist mode of development in Western Europe is entering a period of crisis – an economic crisis, though more particularly a crisis of political and ideological proportions, that broke out in May 1968 in France and in the *mai rampant* in Italy, and has been experienced in most other European countries in a less explosive though no less real fashion.

The history of urban protest movements has yet to run its course. It is possible however to affirm that 1968 was the turning-point. Before then, those movements which disputed the organisation of society in capitalism were

either purely political in outlook or ones whose main target was the organisation of working activity. Other forms of social protest were subsidiary and often even subordinate to these. Since 1968 however, new movements within society have sprung up, even in those countries which had not experienced a fully-blown crisis: the student movement has burst in upon the political arena, and a feminist movement has developed to undermine the patriarchal order of things, while teenagers at school and in technical colleges question the why and wherefore of the educational system. In such a context, urban conflict takes on a new and different dimension. No longer is it an appendage of the labour movement as such, aimed at defending the material living conditions of the working class, nor is it the corporatist reaction of groups with a higher social status seeking to defend their privileges. It is capitalism itself with its self-perpetuating system of social and working relations that is being called into question by other than the working classes (and in particular by the middle classes).

The fundamental question that can at this point be raised is that of the impact of these movements on the social and political system. Are they factors of social change? At what level of the social structure is their influence felt? And do they of themselves lead to any transformations in social relations? As regards urban conflict, we are as yet unable to give a reply to these questions, as not enough is known about the subject. A survey has therefore been carried out of the leading participants in urban conflict in all the countries involved in the present project. There is still only scant written material on urban protest.<sup>1</sup> It was often necessary to obtain information directly *via* interviews. Satisfactory knowledge has been obtained of the situation in France and Italy, as observation has been carried on for almost three years. However, our knowledge of Germany and even more of Great Britain is sadly deficient, while in the Netherlands and Belgium it was possible to carry out an in-depth study in the capital cities alone; and this may destroy our interpretations. The way this work has been carried out will explain any gaps and shortcomings in a paper that can be considered no more than a report on a preliminary survey.

The survey was based upon the following questions:

What are the issues in urban life over which people are moved to collective action?

Which social classes are involved?

What demands are made and what forms of action are used?

Are there particular types of movement which have identical or comparable 'profiles'?

How do these movements influence the urban system?

How are they co-ordinated with the labour movement in each country?

What kind of relationship do they have with the political battlefield and do they affect the system of political power?

## THE ISSUES IN URBAN PROTEST

There is a wide variety of issues which engender and give rise to the development of urban conflict: from urban redevelopment schemes to the preservation of a park or a square, taking in demands for local authority housing or protests over the construction of a motorway. But in all countries the theme of lower-class housing facilities has been that which has led to the most extensive, the widest and often the most virulent conflict.

### HOUSING AND URBAN REDEVELOPMENT

In the majority of the countries studied, housing demands of two kinds are raised in the collective action undertaken by the lower classes. Firstly, the movements dispute the cost to tenants of such housing. In Italy this has extended to attempts to reduce the share of housing expenses in the family budget. Rentpayers' organisations have sprung up, led in France by various groups, with the CNL<sup>2</sup> being the most important, and in England by the tenants associations, while in Italy there exist various different committees linked to extra-parliamentary political groups, together with the SUNIA.<sup>3</sup> In each of these countries, it is public authority housing and its cost to tenants that constitute the social issue, while the cost of private housing has not as yet given rise to any significant protest movement. What has occurred is that protest has arisen over the crisis in housing, a shortage of low-rent local authority accommodation, and this has been felt to a greater or lesser extent in all the various countries. This shortage is most acute in France and Italy, due partly to insufficient public investment and aggravated in Italy by the archaic set-up in the building industry and estate agency organisation, by negligence in the administration machinery, and the extent to which connections count in sharing out public or semi-public housing. In Britain an additional important factor was the wave of rent strikes which followed the attempt by the Conservative Government in 1972 to enforce large increases in the rents of local authority housing. In some cases the elected local councils supported the protests (Sklair 1975).

It is the scarcity of housing which has led to the second movement, the widespread takeover of empty dwellings in Italy and the formation of squatters' groups in Britain and in France. Moreover the question raised in a number of protests over this particular issue has been the fact that housing is frequently short for certain specific sectors of the population. Immigrant workers in France, for example, have been involved in a long campaign to protest against the deterioration of their housing conditions compounded by the lack of public housing facilities available to them.

The problem of housing facilities for the lower classes underlies a large proportion of the protests that have arisen in opposition to projected urban redevelopment in various European capitals. Widespread urban renewal schemes such as those in Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam have been undertaken with a view to altering the social function and constitution of the

relevant city. Old working-class districts have been demolished to make way for office buildings and high-rent apartment blocks. The kind of housing which is thus placed on the market is beyond the means of the original inhabitants and more often than not they are forced to move out to live on the outskirts. In Paris, the process of redevelopment has already advanced a long way and a large number of districts have in recent years undergone an appreciable change in their overall character as regards the economic activities that are carried on and the constitution of resident inhabitants. This is in line with the aim of the dominant class in bringing the role of the French capital round from being one of purely symbolic and political significance, and transforming it into a finance capital. Several projects combine together to emphasise and reinforce Paris as a high-caste administrative centre. The main instrument of this transformation of Paris is urban redevelopment, as this leads to the disappearance of what were the sole remaining industrial areas within Paris itself together with those densely populated lower-class districts and, more especially, areas that are inhabited by immigrants. These are cleared to make way for business premises and accommodation for office employees, middle management and executives (Godard 1973).

The same kind of alterations are to be encountered in Brussels, though at a more accelerated level. Here, there has been an unprecedented development in administrative affairs with the establishment of the EEC headquarters right in the heart of the city. Now that the centre of the agglomeration has been altered, redevelopment is at the moment affecting the periphery, the area around the actual city limits with a high proportion of low-working-class and immigrant inhabitants. The most ambitious scheme covers the northern area where, under the so-called 'Manhattan Plan', it is intended completely to demolish old housing over a wide area that takes in parts of three separate urban districts. The project involves uprooting several thousand residents, and to replace them there will be a world business centre with well over 200 acres of office space and 4000 flats, of which only 1000 will be for low rental accommodation. The principal sectors of the Belgian financial world, together with the high-powered interests of a certain number of multinationals are involved in the plan. Redevelopment in the Brussels agglomeration also covers various other districts as well. Mention can be made of the Marolles, whose inhabitants successfully warded off the original renovation scheme with the result that the final project was so arranged as to mean no loss to the residents. Also, in the Molenbeek district, a planned urban motorway with office accommodation along its route means that almost 6000 working-class residents are to leave their decaying blocks of flats before their demolition.

In Amsterdam, the main instrument behind urban renewal schemes is the metropolitan railway being built to link the city centre with the residential towns going up on the outskirts to house a projected 300,000 inhabitants. The railway has become the main bone of contention in urban protest in Amsterdam and the issue is of no mean proportions, the government having taken a stand in favour of the project – a rare phenomenon in a country

without any great tradition of centralisation. However, what is really at issue is not so much an improvement in the traffic system, but the whole concept of urban redevelopment in Amsterdam. Indeed, the projected route means that a certain number of old working-class districts in the centre of the city are to be demolished. Among these is the area of Nieuwmarkt whose residents are at present up in arms over the scheme. Those now living in such areas are to be sent to the residential towns on the edge of the city, while office buildings and de luxe apartments spring up around the route taken by the railway; and property speculation is rife.

## PUBLIC TRANSPORT

This is less frequently an issue in urban protest than housing, while most collective action in this field has been over the level of the cost to the user. The most widespread of these have occurred in France, in the Paris region, where for nearly a year several demonstrations, often of an imposing nature, have been held without let-up in opposition to fare increases planned by the government. Protests have also occurred in Italian towns against transport rates. These protests have been particularly significant both in form (since in many towns transport users have taken the initiative in fixing their own reduced fares) and in scope (since these actions were a prelude to extending protest, until then centred on housing, to the wider problem of public service charges).

## PUBLIC SERVICE CHARGES

This area of urban organisation has appeared as an issue of conflict in Italy alone. Here, the effects of galloping inflation, combined with the energy crisis, led the Italian government to decide on a 'real cost' drive in the public service area. Emanating from this was an overall price increase covering all services, with electricity rising by 70 per cent during the year 1974. It was in opposition to this that an electricity users' cost reduction campaign started. This was of special importance, both because of the large numbers involved, and because of its profound significance: for the first time in the history of urban conflict in Europe, there was an apparent attempt to expand the area of conflict to cover the whole field of consumer activity controlled either directly or indirectly by the state, and in this the trade-union movement had a direct influence.

## SOCIAL GROUPS AND URBAN CONFLICT

The social basis of such movements is very wide, while the actual classes involved vary considerably according to the kind of issue that is actually behind the conflict. Nevertheless, the occurrence of certain common features may be noted. In the majority of cases, urban conflict is undertaken either by lower working-class and immigrant sectors or it has an overall 'popular'

following, covering blue-collar and white-collar sectors and lower commercial and administrative grades.

1. *Lower working-class and immigrant sectors:* The housing crisis is serious to a greater or lesser degree in most countries in Europe. When, however, it reaches an acute level as in Paris, the lower classes as a whole are affected, with immigrant workers and the lower working class suffering most. Likewise in Italian towns the crisis is felt by the working class, white-collar workers and some sections of middle management, but it is the most extreme for those immigrant workers from the South of Italy living in northern cities. Yet even in those European cities where the housing shortage is the least acute, a crisis still exists in some form or another and those affected are once again the lower working class and immigrant workers. Brussels is a case in point. It is therefore quite understandable that, given that this is so, it is frequently the lower-working-class and immigrant sectors which are involved in protest activity over housing. These groups are for example behind campaigns against redevelopment in Brussels and were involved in the initial waves of unoccupied housing takeover in Italy, and the occupation of empty houses in Frankfurt. These groups are also often involved in squatter activity in France and in Britain. Further, in France a long and vigorous campaign has been undertaken by immigrant workers in protest against the conditions they experience in run-down hostels; they have also organised themselves to resist being turned out of areas due for redevelopment.

2. *Wide-based populist movements:* A much wider section of the population is involved in protests against the cost of housing. In England, France and Italy protest against rent increases is a more or less permanent fact of life in local authority housing areas. However, in all these countries it is very rarely the working class as such which is involved in protest activity. Workers do of course take active part, as we have seen, though their action is not autonomous and they do not provide any distinctive driving force behind such protest. Only Italy has experienced involvement by the working class as such, especially during the course of the *autoriduzione* campaign.

3. *Young people and the intelligentsia.* The influence of one social group is of particular significance in all urban-based movements within these countries: young people (very often students) and certain sectors of the intelligentsia (including architects, town-planners and social workers). As a result of the crisis which has been affecting all these countries in one way or another since 1968, members of these categories feel at some sort of political or ideological crisis point with respect to the overall social system, and urban protest is one way of giving practical expression to this feeling. Some among them use what skills and knowledge they have in the interest of the oppressed classes, thus providing themselves with a means of turning their malaise to good effect. Others see in this the possibility of living out alternative life-styles on collective lines in contrast to the isolated individualism that is the feature of the way of life under capitalism. This applies in particular to the student

milieu and those young people in Germany and Britain who have taken over unoccupied houses to set up centres of community living. Furthermore, students and the intelligentsia act as the prime movers behind this sort of action, particularly where the extra-parliamentary Left is fairly well-developed, their aim being to widen the front in the class war to cover the whole area of problems within society and to mould new forms of protest other than those undertaken by the labour movement, influenced as it is by party action and the parliamentary Left.

## THE VARIOUS TYPES OF URBAN PROTEST MOVEMENTS

Each different protest movement has a particular configuration which depends upon the aims laid down, the forms of protest used in practice and the lines of action followed by the groups which formulate the protest. Above and beyond the specific nature of the movement, varying according to the prevailing conditions, it is possible to pick out certain types of movement with similar patterns of action running through them, and whose constitution and driving potential are governed by the same guiding principles.

### PARTICIPATIONIST MOVEMENTS

These are aimed at influencing planning or political decisions through attempting to have a direct say in them. Their protest activity tends to take the form of lobbying and seeking to establish a kind of negotiation rather than purely pursuing demands. The desired aim is to use the system without disputing the underlying basis. The demands made are usually of an economic nature and any extension into the political arena is avoided. This kind of activity exists in all the countries studied, though their effect in urban protest movements is varied, with a more marked influence in Belgium and in the UK.

Participationist movements in Belgium are primarily of two forms. First, there are the local district action committees which have running through them a 'popular' current after the manner of regular welfare organisations. It was these groups which gave inspiration to the Marolles protest campaign, the most significant movement against urban redevelopment in Brussels. This current has a predominantly lower-working-class and immigrant basis, though no class analysis of the district underlies the way it works, and it does not embrace any one particular group within society. The distinction is made between the rich on the one hand and the poor on the other, between the haves and the have-nots, between the 'populace' and those with the power that money brings. A substantial part of the activity of the Marolles committee, its *Comité Général d'Action*, is taken up with economic or legal aid to families, backed by the aim of seeking collaboration with the authorities and participating in drawing up new redevelopment plans with those responsible within the local authority.

A further 'technicist' current also occurs behind protest activity of a participatory nature in Belgium. The '*Atelier de Recherche Architectural et Urbanistique*', an association grouping together trade union militants, architects and urbanists, has connections with the previous form of action, but differs in the kind of action undertaken, utilising the technical expertise of specialists who put forward alternative proposals to those of the authorities and the property developers. These counter-proposals are so conceived as to be perfectly viable, while being cast within a different architectural concept or one conveying an alternative view of society. The primary aim is that the solutions advocated remain ones that are technically sound and economically feasible. Of essential importance is this movement's action in informing the population and negotiating with the authorities, the objective being to contribute to urban regulation by encouraging a more rational re-organisation on a human level – one that takes into account the interests and requirements of the residents, the urban 'consumers', whatever their social situation.

This participationist outlook is also a feature of a certain number of urban-based movements in Britain. Besides those very active associations which devote themselves exclusively to aid in dealing with legal affairs (there is a permanent legal action group in each district of London), a large proportion of tenants' organisations and even squatter groups share the same characteristics. The action of most tenants' associations is primarily structured with a view to exercising pressure through the use of statutory weapons upon local housing organisations and the local authorities – recourse to direct action is not habitually undertaken in asserting their claims. Even within the squatter movement, itself a form of direct action, there has been some tendency towards institutionalisation, and spokesmen for the squatters have obtained recognition with the local councils and have helped the housing authorities in seeking out the unoccupied dwellings in the district and distributing them to priority families on the housing list; they thus make a direct contribution to restricting the very import of their own protest movement.

## MILITANT MOVEMENTS

Movements with a militant line in pursuing specific claims reverse their priorities in relation to participatory movements. They do not refuse to negotiate with the relevant authorities over the affair at issue, though they prefer direct 'demand' activity, negotiations taking place on the basis of a previously established balance of power. They reject any form of institutionalisation which, taking as it does a participatory turn, may be liable to restrict their movements, barring them from action which is only feasible on condition that they retain some degree of autonomy. They therefore have less resort to pressure through lobbying activity, preferring more direct kinds of action (demonstrations, rent strikes, squatting, and the like). The demands themselves also take a different tone, either more or less immediate economic demands, or those disputing in a more far-reaching fashion the central point

of contention, the urban 'system'. However, the process is still the same as before: a specific point of dispute is raised and the idea is to press concrete demands and try to make sure they are satisfied by creating a situation which is indisputably in their favour, thus forcing the opposing party to negotiate from a position of weakness.

Most of the more important urban movements in France and Italy are of this type. Typical is the case of immigrant workers in France protesting against conditions in their 'homes' (no more than doss-houses that have been set up in abandoned factories or insanitary cellars), the demands being that their amenities be improved or they be rehoused in proper accommodation. Over a period of three years, from 1970 to 1972, these demands have been pressed by rent strikes in most of the hostels. The summer of 1972 also witnessed a widespread rent strike among young workers living in hostel accommodation in the Paris area: behind this was rejection of an increase in boarding fees and demands for the free expression of trade union and political views inside the hostel walls and the abolition of rules curtailing visits from outsiders. A vigorous protest movement over public transport facilities also took place in Paris for over a year, between 1970 and 1971. A series of demonstrations, together with over one hundred different residents' committees, called for policy measures giving top priority to public transport, protest being centred around one particular demand: that for employers to pay for transport passes.<sup>4</sup> Numerous campaigns against redevelopment, with rent strikes and collective resistance against eviction orders, testify to the will of lower-class residents not to accept renovation inside their own area if it is to their detriment. The demand centres around their being rehoused in the same district with subsidised rented accommodation built in the face of the widespread capitalist redevelopment of Paris; they likewise reject the 'deportation' of present inhabitants of Paris out to the suburbs. Finally, a less spectacular though permanent and deeply ingrained movement has been emerging over the past few years in most residential areas of any size in France, and is particularly firmly seated within the outskirts of large towns on public authority or semi-public housing estates. This takes the form of a kind of consumer unionism based on specific demands regarding housing costs, public amenities, and setting up open spaces and social facilities, while providing the basis of rent strikes, the refusal to pay electricity bills, etc., and a variety of demonstrations aimed at housing managers and others responsible for running the estates.

It is however in Italy where the militant urban protest movement is the most virulent. Initially centred on the question of housing, it has gradually extended to other issues – educational and medical facilities, child-minding amenities and, above all, the problem of public service charges. What is significant about the movement is the extent to which it has taken hold. In all the large towns of Italy tens of thousands of houses have been taken over and as many households pay their own cut-rate level of rent on a long-term basis. Of particular interest are the forms of action undertaken and the level at which demands are pitched. Here, in contrast to France, demands are less

defensive and more direct. The central demand over rent levels is based on keeping them proportional to the household's spending power – and not simply demands aimed against threatened increases. As for the form that the action takes, there is widespread resort to direct measures to achieve the demands – those who are poorly housed are not content solely to press for local authority assisted housing, but back up their claim by taking over unoccupied dwellings. Likewise, rent-payers do not just carry out actions with a view to obtaining reductions, but go so far as to reduce the rent themselves by sending off 10 per cent of their wages in lieu. This has been extended, with transport users making their own fare cuts and electricity users reducing their bills in protest against increases in public service charges.

This kind of activity, with specific demands put forward being backed by direct forms of action, has also developed to some degree in West Germany. Since 1971 immigrant workers at Frankfurt have been taking over unoccupied housing and carrying out rent strikes in spite of the severe repression undertaken by the state authorities. Their housing situation is disastrous and they seek to improve matters, endeavouring to oppose the property speculation that finds a breeding ground within area redevelopment projects whereby old housing is demolished and the original residents evicted.

Likewise in Holland most of the city district protest campaigns evolve after the fashion of militant demand activity. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the authorities have a more open attitude towards negotiation than in the previous countries, protest still goes somewhat beyond the institutional bounds. Opposition to redevelopment plans often takes the form of rent strikes and occupations, though a rare degree of violence has been attained in the Nieuwmarkt district of Amsterdam. This has lived in a veritable state of siege, and at one point a running battle took place between the residents and the police who had been brought in to clear the way for the demolition contractors.

In Britain and Belgium on the other hand most protest, as has been seen, has been participatory, and the level of institutionalisation is very high. However, some more recent forms have broken with the general trend towards 'negotiation by lobby'. In Britain a minority section of the tenants' movement is beginning to organise itself in a more independent fashion and local-based protest has arisen with a view to obtaining social amenities; opposition has been directed against the redevelopment of certain areas of London by means of mass resistance to eviction procedures; and the poorly-housed have given expression to their discontent by large-scale squatting (a high-water mark being the occupation of Centre Point<sup>5</sup>). In Belgium, a new current of urban protest has come about due to opposition to the Manhattan Plan for renovating North Brussels. Centred around the *Agence Scherbequaise d'Information*, its aim is to give some form to the immediate demands of the local residents and encourage alternative modes of action to those of institutionalised negotiation and counter-proposals. Unlike the 'participatory' forms of action, it uses the social constitution of the districts as a frame of reference and tries to evoke an anti-capitalist militancy.

The activity of militant movements in urban conflict therefore varies between countries in its intensity and level of organisation. Hesitant in Belgium and Britain, extreme though fragile in the Netherlands and Germany, such protest has become rooted and durable in France and Italy. As far as Italy is concerned, its extent and the impact it has had on all forms of urban protest enable one to speak of a highly militant 'urban unionism', an arena of substantial ideological debate. The same kind of phenomenon seems to be developing within France at the present time and, while still seeking wider impact and direction (since the areas it covers and the demands it advances are widely disparate in tone), it nevertheless forms the bedrock of a number of significant movements.

### URBAN-BASED POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

Certain 'struggles' have been of particular significance, not so much because of their actual influence within the urban-based movement as through the political project that they have tried to evoke. These were the housing occupation campaigns led by *Lotta Continua*<sup>6</sup> and *Potere Operaio*<sup>7</sup> in Italy during 1971. Deriving as it does from a specific contradiction within the urban set-up (i.e. shortages in subsidised housing facilities), the aim of this kind of movement is to highlight and give substance to a strategy of struggle other than that of the labour movement, through the *avant-garde* nature of the form taken (direct action outside the law), and through the will to confront the state machinery head-on (house occupations in Italy invariably end up in clashes with the police). Left out on a limb as it was the movement collapsed, torn by internal dissensions provoked by the difference in the level of political awareness between those initiating the struggle and the mass of residents. It nevertheless spread beyond the Italian frontier, affecting both militants in Germany and the squatter movement in France. As far as this latter was concerned, it constituted at the time the common ground upon which the French lower working class and immigrants, in their aspiration to find decent housing conditions of some sort, encountered the political aims of the *Secours Rouge* movement<sup>8</sup> aiming at instigating a political counter-force against capitalist city planning. These two branches of the movement could never become completely amalgamated, and the campaign collapsed beneath the repressive measures directed against it. They were never therefore able to consolidate themselves as an urban-based political movement and the predominant component remained that of revolt on an ideological level. The movement was nevertheless highly significant and illustrates the consequences of the political orientations of the currents which have developed.

Such urban-based political movements have stood out against the more conventional modes of collective action taking place within the urban context. While they have had no further direct consequences, they still share the same stock as run-of-the-mill urban protest. In Italy, they have contributed support to direct forms of action, nowadays part and parcel of the whole of urban protest though arising from a different social and political

TABLE 10.1: *Types of urban protest movements*

	<i>Participationist movements</i>	<i>Militant movements</i>	<i>Urban-based political movements</i>	<i>Ideological movements</i>
<b>Belgium</b>	Redevelopment (e.g. Marolles) Lower working / immigrants/ intelligentsia/ small shopkeepers.	Redevelopment (e.g. North Brussels) Lower working/ immigrants/ intelligentsia.		
<b>France</b>		Subsidised housing, transport Multi-class populist Redevelopment Workers/Lower working/ immigrants/students. Immigrant worker accommodation Immigrants. Public housing (cost) Multi-class populist Housing (shortage) Lower working/ students. Transport (cost) Public services workers	Squatters (in part)   Lower working/ immigrants/political militants (youth)	Squatters   Lower working/ immigrants/political militants (youth)
<b>Italy</b>			Housing (shortage)  'Take over the town' movement.  Lower working/students	

	<i>Participationist movements</i>	<i>Militant movements</i>	<i>Urban-based political movements</i>	<i>Ideological movements</i>
Netherlands		Young worker hostels Young workers. Redevelopment Multi-class populist Students		
United Kingdom	Subsidised housing (cost) Multi-class populist  Squatters - Subsidised housing (shortage) Lower-working/ immigrants/youth	Subsidised housing Social amenities Multi-class populist		Squatters  youth (students/ unemployed)
West Germany		Housing - Redevelop- ment - Speculation Immigrant workers plus student militants		Squatters  youth (students/ unemployed/workers)

current. They have unmasked the extent to which political interests have a stake within local and urban organisation and administrative affairs, while demonstrating the difficulties which arise in fusing a mass protest movement with an overtly political 'struggle' whose aim is to undermine the machinery of the state.

## IDEOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS

Certain experiences of urban protest are linked to the social and ideological crisis opened up in most countries of Europe by the May 1968 movement. A rejection of the capitalist organisation of society has been expressed in various ways among sectors of youth: for example, in endeavours to transform their day-to-day existence by setting up community living experiments in opposition to individual – and family – orientated modes of life. This is why, especially in West Germany and England, a large part of the squatter movement is made up solely of young people (students, young workers and unemployed) who take over whole blocks of flats or housing lots. Only at a subsidiary level do such protest movements have a militant stance on the question of housing. Their principal aim does not hinge on specific political objectives even if in Germany at least it is often students from the extra-parliamentary Left who live in such a fashion. 'Protests' of this kind revolve first and foremost around the way social relationships are arranged and in a fairly original manner link a form of action aimed at 'changing things' in urban life to a movement directed at transforming day-to-day life-styles.

The table gives a rundown of the main protest movements in the various countries showing the issues around which they arise together with the social group from which they derive their support.

## THE INFLUENCE OF THE MOVEMENTS ON THE URBAN SYSTEM

The dynamic behind the urban-based movements cannot be grasped unless reference is made to their effects on those basic inconsistencies, the 'contradictions', that lie behind them. Some have succeeded in altering the course of a production-based urban structure, replacing it with one which is more in line with the interests of the inhabitants. This, however, is the exception. More often than not these protest movements result is nothing more than a readjustment within the system; they succeed in obtaining a certain number of slight modifications that have regard to those demands put forward, but they do not call into question the 'logic', the guiding principles lying behind what causes and perpetuates that part of the system around which protest is centred. Finally, certain particular struggles have ended ultimately in a rout for the urban-based movement.

## THE URBAN SITUATION – AN UNCHANGING REALITY

We have knowledge of only three examples of movements that have successfully and incontrovertibly countered urban policy and constrained the authorities to call off their initial project and replace it with another.

In Brussels the campaign against the Marolles redevelopment led to cancellation of the original project which involved the demolition of a fair proportion of the area. Bipartite commissions were set up to open negotiations, and the end-result was a redevelopment plan providing for renovation to the benefit of the residents, satisfying most of their demands. The original street plan and architectural proportions were retained; the social constitution of the district was to be maintained, with subsidised housing, small tradesmen and shopkeepers; the actual redevelopment was to be undertaken piecemeal to avoid uprooting residents during the work; and rent increases were to be restricted so that people would not be compelled to leave following the rebuilding.

Such a *volte-face* also took place in two districts in Amsterdam – Dapperbuurst and Jordaan. In Dapperbuurst, the local authorities planned to transform the area by demolishing the run-down buildings occupied by working-class families and small shopkeepers and allowing a new shopping centre to be built. The outcome secured by the residents was a piecemeal reconstruction scheme involving rebuilding the district in sections, with the inhabitants being rehoused as each group of buildings was completed. The Jordaan district, an area composed of small trades and working-class housing, was due to be razed to the ground to make way for office buildings. The demolition process was held up by the local action committee occupying the buildings, and legal proceedings were started with a view to retaining the character of the districts. As at Dapperbuurst, the residents obtained a stage-by-stage renovation to their own benefit, constraining the municipal authorities to build housing of reasonable size to fill the gaps torn in the city fabric and avoid indiscriminate office building. It is obviously too early in these three cases for a final conclusion to be reached; in particular it is not at all certain that working-class tenants will be able to bear the extra rents which will be the inevitable outcome of redevelopment. In both Dapperbuurst and Jordaan, rent-cutting campaigns have been started in the rebuilt flats. In the Marolles district it is apparent that the previous residents, upon their return, have some difficulty in fitting in with their new surroundings; the social constitution of the district is tending gradually to alter in spite of the guarantees that had previously been obtained.

Nevertheless, in all three situations, the principle of redevelopment in urban areas with a view to clearing the way for office buildings and 'high-class' housing, involving uprooting the previous residents, has been countered by collective action on the part of the inhabitants.

## REGULATING THE URBAN SITUATION

It would take up too much time and space to spell out all those campaigns that have led to projects being suspended or delayed, or that have meant modifications in the light of demands put forward during protest activity.

However, the example of squatters in Britain merits attention. Following the clever manipulation of fairly liberal laws,<sup>9</sup> it is not possible for squatters to be evicted by the police, so that London now contains flourishing colonies of undeterred 'squatterism'. The problem of the provision of low-cost housing still remains, however and the squatter movement has done nothing to question housing finance and allocation methods. The French protest campaign over public transport has meant that for three consecutive periods planned fare increases have had to be put off; and that after a year-long protest, the increase, when it occurred, applied only to ordinary fares, while workers' bus passes were exempt. Nevertheless, the crisis in public transport facilities is just as acute and the cost to households just as great. In France once more, the series of protests which have taken place over low-cost housing have had some if limited success, while there has been no overall reform of low-cost housing construction provisions or the means used by local authorities to allocate such amenities. In Italy, the takeover of unoccupied housing in working-class districts of large towns has meant that thousands of people have eventually been allocated a residence, and moreover negotiations have taken place in the public housing sector to limit rent levels to a ceiling of not more than 12 per cent of the average regional wage. Once again, however, these protest movements have not succeeded in affecting the principle behind housing construction in Italian towns, nor the means used to allocate such housing. The *autoriduzione* campaigns have led to the cancellation of increases in public transport fares and a 20 per cent reduction in increases in electricity charges, but have not led to any reorganisation of the way in which these major public services are run.

## THE SELF-PERPETUATING URBAN SITUATION

It must also be stated that a certain number of these protest movements have proved themselves incapable of having any effect whatsoever on the projects behind them. The urban situation is a self-perpetuating continuum, guided by unchanging features and principles, while collective action is powerless to stand in its way. Two cases in point, urban renewal in Paris and the redevelopment in North Brussels, are typical of such ineffectiveness. In both instances, the aim of the inhabitants was to have a form of redevelopment which guaranteed that they remained in the same area. They managed merely to obtain guarantees on rehousing some of their number, though even these were eventually forced to leave the district. There was no thoroughgoing alteration in the projected low-rent housing quota, and the position today is that the Paris areas due for redevelopment are now bristling with high-rise

office buildings and blocks of middle-class flats, while in Brussels the northern part of the city is being methodically ripped up by the bulldozers.

## DETERMINANTS OF URBAN EFFECTS

If we compare the various protest movements with one another, what is apparent is that the determining factors leading to the predominance of urban effects are not so much the kind of protest or the numbers taking part, as the extent of the interests involved and the political orientations of the dominant classes.

Any protest which secures overriding success in affecting the urban structure can be comprehended only with reference to a particular balance of power connected with the prevailing political situation and the importance attached to the question at issue. The reason why the protests in the Dapperbuurst and Jordaan districts of Amsterdam were successful is that, even though the local authority's urban planning project was in dispute, it was attacked from only a marginal standpoint, and the interests of capital as such were not fundamentally at stake. Nevertheless, the end-result of the Nieuwmarkt campaign over the metropolitan railway is far less certain. The violence with which clashes have taken place is an indication of the extent to which the city council and the central government are determined, whatever the cost, to put through a project involving not only the main capitalist interests in the Netherlands itself but those of Europe as a whole. The same is true of urban redevelopment in Paris and the Brussels Manhattan Plan.

Political factors also play a substantial part in the final outcome of urban-based protest movements. Where the dominant order is represented by a Social Democratic local authority, it is a prisoner of the inconsistency between the need to retain its left-wing electorate (at least partly satisfying working-class aspirations) and those administrative requirements which remain dependent upon capitalist principles. In these conditions, effective pressure can be exercised to exact substantial concessions even by participatory movements. Such inconsistencies may at least in some measure explain the success achieved at Jordaan and Dapperbuurst and in the Marolles, in contrast to what happened in the case of urban renewal in Paris and North Brussels. Here, it was the central authority of the state, less amenable to this kind of pressure, which was directly involved. In effect, the main reason for failures of urban protest appears to be the existence of a direct confrontation with the state administrative machinery.

An appraisal of these effects of urban protest movements should not however be based solely upon the impact they have on the urban structure. They develop within a social and political context which is itself influenced by them. The potential they exercise within society may thus be seized fully by an analysis of their relationships with the labour movement and political conflict.

## URBAN CONFLICT, SOCIAL CONFLICT AND POLITICAL CONFLICT

As has been pointed out beforehand, most urban-based protest movements are either linked to a particular section of society (such as, say, immigrant workers) or have a multi-class basis. Union conflict situations involving solely 'the workers' are few and far between. Nevertheless, the working class does play a significant role within such protest. Furthermore, these forms of conflict often lead on to a fundamental contestation over the way society is organised. For these reasons, the origin of these movements, the part they play in the system and those guiding principles embodied within society, and their actual constitution depend to a considerable extent on the way they relate to the labour movement itself and the political system as such.

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN URBAN CONFLICT AND THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

The labour movement in most of these countries is not involved in the major part of urban protest, and where such protest is organised, this is done entirely separately from trade union bodies. And the opposite is also true: urban questions do not arise in claims put forward during industrial disputes. In the Netherlands and West Germany this separation is absolute, in the latter country all the more so in that the working class plays no part whatsoever in urban conflict. Certain links do exist in Belgium, France and Britain, but these usually come about through the activity of individual militants or union representatives and no collective involvement is implied during a particular conflict.

In Belgium, for example union militants are often to be found in the local action committees, though (as is the case in Brussels, where Christian union officers play an active part in the ARAU) they do so only in an individual capacity. Similarly in France representatives from the large unions do take part in the main demonstrations organised by the CNL, though here only isolated experiences with a view to closer and more organised links between these movements have taken place. During the protest over public transport fare increases, the CGT and the CFDT added their weight to the campaign alongside left-wing political groups in the combined movement aimed at improving the amenity. Discussions on the demands were held inside industrial plants, and workers from plants on the outskirts of Paris massed to join the main demonstrations in the city. In the wake of this general movement, disputes were carried on at plant level over works bus facilities.

Some parts of London have seen the growth of the Claimants' Unions, area-based organisations on union lines grouping together unemployed workers. These have joined forces with local action groups over employment protection matters on a wider scale, by organising protest over plant shut-downs both inside the works itself and throughout the local area concerned.

Thus not only does the struggle over maintaining the level of employment take on a meaning just for those workers in line for redundancy, but also in relation to the evolution of urban life and the proper balance of activities within a given district.

However, it is only in Italy that the links between the urban protest movement and the labour movement are more structured and of an increasingly permanent nature. When the urban movements first got off the ground, this link was only a side-issue which operated primarily through ties between plant union structures and extra-parliamentary political groups. At Milan, for example, close links were established between the *Unione Inquilini*<sup>10</sup> and a certain number of plant-level *Comitate Unitare de Base*<sup>11</sup> through the intermediary of *Avanguardia Operaia*. For some time the trade union movement was not affected by urban protest, but labour organisations later became increasingly conscious of the importance of urban issues. The position on the question was first adopted at national level in September 1969, with the drawing up of a document which set out a series of demands for tackling the housing crisis. This was backed by a general strike over the housing issue in November, resulting in negotiations between the unions and the government which ultimately led, at the end of 1971, to adoption of a law on housing reform.<sup>12</sup> Action over housing issues alone has however given rise to a certain amount of controversy within union circles. The position of the major union confederations is still one of some hostility towards this kind of protest. Nevertheless, a number of individual unions are increasingly in favour of forming a united front of unions and local protest campaign committees within the framework of regional and local union councils. This was laid down in principle in February 1971 in a joint document of the FIOM-CGIL, the FIM-CISL and the UILM that expressed support for the methods which from then on were to be an integral part of the housing protest movement (i.e. rent *autoriduzioni* and the occupation of empty houses). Trade union sympathy for urban protest was to take on widespread practical form during the 1974 campaign for the reduction of public transport fares and electricity costs.

Where the overall trend is to very high rates of inflation, it is not enough to defend wage levels solely within the industrial situation if workers' spending power is to be maintained. The need to provide a link between obtaining wage increases and combating rising prices means that the intervention of the unions must extend beyond industrial undertakings; direct forms of action used at plant level are also applied during housing protests. In this way, the campaign to cut transport costs and subsequently electricity costs which was to be widespread in Turin and Venice was launched and actively directed by the unions.

Even though it is not possible to speak of labour conflict always going hand-in-hand with urban conflict, and any experience of this nature has had only a local impact, it is still of supreme significance as a new form of relationship for tackling the inconsistencies of the relationship between industrial 'production' and social 'reproduction'. For the first time, the labour movement as

such has been the leader in collective action in the realm of consumer interests.

## URBAN CONFLICT AND POLITICAL CONFLICT

If then the impact of urban struggles on the social structure depends on the relationship they have to the struggle of workers in industry, it is also tied to the struggle at a political level. Where the way in which urban affairs are run by the dominant classes is in dispute, those taking part in such conflicts must inevitably be led to appreciate their position in relation to the authority exercised by the dominant ideology. With the increasingly political turn taken by urban affairs within society under advanced capitalism, together with the direct involvement of the state in planning matters and also, more generally, in running the consumption process, the final outcome is to politicise urban issues. Politically orientated urban conflict does not however spring automatically from this, since, although such conflict does form part of the inter-class conflictual context, it always arises from a particular 'contradiction'. The political turn which urban conflict either does or does not take is not so much due to political conflict and urban conflict regularly going hand in hand as the two becoming one as a result of prevailing conditions. Indeed, it is only during situations of acute political and social crisis that a direct struggle against the system of class domination can build up any momentum through urban conflicts as such. Outside such periods any link between the two comes about because political groups have so desired it. The danger is then that these kinds of struggle, as has been seen in the case of politically based urban movements, may be left out on a limb and find themselves unable to resist repression by the machinery of the state.

Any close co-ordination between urban and political conflict varies in degree according to the country involved. The big difference, however, is in the way in which any co-ordination actually arises, whether it occurs *via* the political parties themselves or through the general struggle of the oppressed classes; takes on its form primarily at the local level or at the level of central politics; and is embodied in parliamentary or extra-parliamentary activity.

*Urban conflict and political conflict as distinctive issues.* The sole country where there is a complete separation between urban and political conflict is the Netherlands. In this country political affairs are run by the Social Democratic parties, which explains why these parties do not participate in struggles at an urban level. The fact that the extra-parliamentary left-wing organisations are also virtually non-existent means that this kind of conflict has no solid basis within an alternative political strategy to that of the Social Democrats. The low level of political consciousness in Dutch labour disputes, and the relative inertia of industrial conflict, do not stimulate those involved in urban conflict to the elaboration of political foundations for their movement. Even in those rare cases in which urban protest spawns organisations that also intervene in political problems, the two kinds of action do not come together. An example

of this is that of the Stecke Arm group, active in urban protest in the Dapperbuurst district of Amsterdam, which took up various political campaigns, especially over the Vietnam war. This political side of its activity was not however rooted in the urban protest itself and had no real connection with it. The fact that there is no direct link does not imply that the protest is 'apolitical', as it does have a certain particular political significance by arousing working-class consciousness and, as such, represents the sole breach made up to now in the edifice of the typical Social Democratic system. This is based on the dual participation-negotiation credo, which protest, by its very existence, calls question.

*The link between urban and political conflict through political parties:* More frequently political parties serve as the channel between the two forms of conflict. In this case, urban protest does not lead directly into political conflict, but it does obtain a sympathetic hearing and active support in the declared aims and practical purposes of the various political organisations.

In Belgium this link operates in two directions. First, the Belgian Communist Party actively participates in urban protest movements. It tries to bring the various conflicts to bear in the overall political battle for the municipal control of urban lands. Its recent establishment of local district action committees seems to tie in with a tactic of diversifying alliances. As far as strategy goes, its aim is to form a *Union de Démocrates et Progressistes*, providing a political alternative to the Belgian left. In its overtures to the working class the Communist Party aligns itself particularly with the Social Democrats, via the socialist union confederation, the FGVB; its intervention in urban protest seems to correspond with another kind of alliance based on combined action with the Christian Democrats.

The second way in which this link occurs is through certain extra-parliamentary political groups (usually of Maoist inspiration). Here the idea is to contribute to creating anti-capitalist feeling in what they regard as a 'second-line' front, so as to build up a revolutionary wave representing a credible political alternative. Such groups latch on to district action committees and endeavour to give the actual grievances of the inhabitants an anti-capitalist dimension and driving force.

The same dual link is also found in Britain. The Communist Party plays an important part within tenants' organisations and district action committees (after having neglected them for a long time in favour of activity in industrial plants), though also in defiance of these bodies, which largely attract lower-middle-class elements. Its present involvement in urban conflict is both a response to a desire to expand its social basis and also an attempt to build an alliance with groups other than the working class. The urban protest movement in Britain is also marked by the presence and the intervention of extra-parliamentary left-wing groups. The most active of them, the International Socialists (Trotskyist) advocate a closer link, and even total amalgamation, between the action committees and local union branches. This would provide a link between all areas of social conflict within the

framework of an overall revolutionary strategy which, as they see it, should be primarily undertaken by the trade unions.

In Germany any co-ordination between urban and political conflict is obtained primarily through extra-parliamentary left-wing channels. In France and Italy, the connection between the political parties and urban protest is of a much closer and more structured nature. Nevertheless, the link between urban and political conflict tends to go beyond the strict limits of purely organisational ties.

*The link between urban and political conflict on the local political scene:* The relationships between urban conflict and political party activity in France are of a highly structured nature both as regards the demands that are put forward and the overall strategic structure within which such conflict takes place. The French Communist Party takes part in most of these movements that constitute in its eyes a means of widening its class basis to those groups that are not so involved in industrial conflict as the working classes. People are thus encouraged to voice demands in line with the main guidelines on urban matters set out in the French Left's *Programme Commun*. It is in this way that the PCF plays an active part in the majority of protests over low-rent housing facilities in running the CNL, the main tenants' association. In Communist-controlled local authorities it runs a series of campaigns directed against the central state machinery with a view to obtaining public amenities, since these cannot be achieved at local level following financial restrictions imposed on the local authorities in general. The *Parti Socialiste Unifié* (Socialist left) has also played a substantial part in urban protest movements, drumming up support for demands with an anti-capitalist flavour and giving priority to workers' control of their social environment. Along with *Lutte Ouvrière* (Trotskyist), it was behind the vigorous campaign against public transport fare rises, with the creation of a *Fédération des Comités d'Usagers des Transports* which for over a year was to co-ordinate the action of a hundred or so action committees from Paris and the suburbs. It also pressed for the whole protest movement to adopt the central demand of having fares to and from work paid for by the employers. Other extra-parliamentary left-wing groups (most of them of Maoist inspiration) have also been very active in a certain number of urban-based movements. Besides the campaign for occupying empty dwellings, led by *Secours Rouge*, they have played a substantial role in the drive against redevelopment projects and in conflicts arising over hostel accommodation for young workers and immigrants. They stress either on the one hand the anti-capitalist resolve behind the demands which they embody, or the rejection of reformist, election-orientated activity; the use of direct forms of action undertaken outside the law is thus actively supported by these groups. What they seek is, through the support obtained by mobilising mass action, to force substantial cracks in the political strategy of the parties of the parliamentary left.

The majority of urban protests in France not only fit into the strategy undertaken by the major political forces, they increasingly occupy a specific

place within the political struggle. The relationship is no longer simply abstract. Political conflict feeds itself on urban conflict, it develops as the other develops, in a symbiotic relationship. Even though this kind of connection has not, for the moment, come about in conflict *vis-à-vis* the central authorities, it is still perfectly tangible at a local level. Thus, the victory of left-wing forces in local elections in the Paris suburbs was only possible because urban conflict had widened the basis of protest against the incumbent local authorities, with grievances gaining a hearing with left-wing parties. Moreover, the Gamist movement<sup>13</sup> formed itself upon the basis of urban conflict.

*The link between urban and political conflict at a national level:* It is in Italy that urban and political conflict are linked together to the closest extent. Every large left-wing political organisation has involved itself actively in urban protest movements, promoting a highly elaborated strategy. Due to their number, their extent and their strength, urban protest movements have almost everywhere held in check those local authorities that are run by the right and have contributed to a considerable extent to the overwhelming victory of the left in the latest regional elections. On a national level, urban conflict is just one aspect of all those acute social conflicts with which the country has been riven since 1969, thus contributing to the increased fragility of the present political situation and representing an element of the nationwide political strategies of the major left-wing parties.

The prime link is that forged by the practice of the Italian Communist Party, long since a leading performer in urban protest movements. Its action aims at obtaining reform throughout all levels of the institutional system, the idea being to exercise the greatest pressure on both national and local authorities to obtain short- and medium-term improvements in working-class living conditions, while at the same time assuming greater direct responsibility in running affairs, either through bipartite organisations, alone, or in alliance with other political parties. The institution of such reforms is speeded by the PCI when it co-operates in running public authority housing organisations and in controlling local or regional authorities. It also at the same time 'proves its worth' as a candidate for the political administration of the country as a whole. In this context, urban conflict enables the Party to expand the class basis forming the foundation of its strategy by bringing social groups alongside the working class (white-collar employees and middle management) into a widely-based movement for urban reform.

Its activity in this sphere is demarcated by two separate points of attraction: first, through expanding and developing on a wide scale the organisational structures of working-class struggle through the creation of 'unions' (the UNIA and then the SUNIA); and second, by providing direction from the centre (supported by local and national protest movements) for increasing democracy within housing organisations and obtaining legislative and financial reforms giving priority to low-rent housing facilities.

Within this framework, it encourages the development of institutional pressure to obtain the participation of residents' groups in drawing up a new

housing policy (cf. the negotiations leading to 'Law 865'), and the participation of SUNIA representatives on the Administrative Council of the IACP for negotiating rent levels in public authority housing. It has therefore taken a critical stand against those direct forms of action which have been stimulated by the activity of extra-parliamentary groups, and was thus opposed to the initial waves of taking over unoccupied housing, manifesting as they did a level of violence and a limited social basis which would endanger its policy of widening alliances. Likewise, it expressed its opposition in the early days of the rent-cutting campaign. When this form of action became more widespread and popular, and the PCI was forced to take it up on its own account, it did so by channelling the campaign into an entirely separate tactical form. When for example in 1971 it lent support to the organisation by SUNIA of a vast housing takeover movement and a long rent-cutting campaign in Rome, its objective was to create a sufficiently credible balance of power to oblige the local authorities to open negotiations. Further, the fact of cutting rents is not an end in itself, but has the same (tactical) function as an all-out rent strike and forces the housing administration groups to come to the negotiating table over this issue.

The involvement of the PCI in urban protest movements has certainly contributed to widening its popular following, to which recent electoral gains testify.

The strategy of the extra-parliamentary left is entirely different. They reject the Communist Party's line based on a reformist attitude, while their own aim is to bring urban conflict into an overall political strategy with a view to opening up a revolutionary crisis leading to the eventual overthrow of the machinery of the state. In the eyes of all these groups, a strong, widely-based urban movement would contribute to creating the conditions to promote a further new inter-class political relationship. They aim at giving a radical and political turn to such conflicts, so widening the front of the workers' struggle to cover all social issues and prise the working class out of its reformist rut in the struggle against capitalism.

Within this overall framework, each group has its own line and tactics. For *Lotta Continua*, urban conflict is not a second-line front that is subject to the momentum imposed by the labour movement and political processes, but is a necessary condition for extending the class struggle against the capitalist system. This explains their slogan, with its 'Take over the town' ring about it, stressing the question of working-class autonomy. In the eyes of *Lotta Continua*, those struggles which take place within society are first and foremost basic elements for building up working-class autonomy before they are prime sources of inter-class alliance. The political line with respect to urban conflict is thus a two-headed one, based on 'self-organisation' in, say, the takeover of unoccupied dwellings by the poorly-housed and, beyond the objectives of demand activity, the strategic prospect of organising a total movement against capitalism and reformism.

The *Avanguardia Operaia* group has a very similar line to that of *Lotta Continua* as regards encouraging working-class autonomy through urban

conflict, though giving greater emphasis to the question of the organisation of the masses *via* urban conflict. While, like *Lotta Continua*, it gives priority to the most under-privileged sections of society in its activity, and thus lends its support to the occupation of empty housing, this group nevertheless stresses the need for continuous and gradualist forms of action, discounting those of an isolated and radical nature.

The *Il Manifesto* – PDUP group also advocates widening the area of social protest to cover all sectors of ‘consumption’. The only means of enabling movements within society to call into overall question the social and political system is to socialise the struggle. The PDUP therefore supports all new forms of urban conflict, e.g. occupation and rent and fare reduction campaigns. Nevertheless, PDUP policy differs from those of *Lotta Continua* and *Avanguardia Operaria* with respect to the question of the unions, as it sees the main objective as being unity between disputes in industry and urban protest, which can only be achieved through the unions’ intervening in urban conflict.

With this in view, and with the mutual agreement of left-wing trade-unionists, the militants advocate the development of area-based councils grouping together the union groups, political organisations and parties, and district action committees existing in the same area. Such bodies would then prefigure a counterforce of the people. As things stand, these councils very often exist in theory only, but the intention is to transform them into true instruments of co-ordinating social policy overall. For the PDUP, the Turin *autoriduzione* campaign, in which it played a substantial part, confirmed its thesis that union action can transform urban conflict, in itself cut off from the labour movement as such, into a mass uprising against capitalism.

As a political party, this group accords much greater importance than the other two bodies to any partial advances that can be made within the system. It does not disparage the achievement of partial reforms and gives pride of place to any that are liable to create structural imbalances. In this manner, on the basis of the campaign to pay reduced electricity charges, it advocates a long-term struggle for ‘politically fair’ public service charges (charges fixed outside the limits of market forces and in accordance with social needs as expressed by the working class).

## SOME TENTATIVE HYPOTHESIS

The aim here is not to try to evolve a theory of ‘urban conflictuality’ which will take account of the wide diversity of conflict and protest, nor each country’s varying potential energy in this domain. This would require in-depth research on each individual country and this has not so far been undertaken. It is possible however to offer a series of central hypotheses to initiate discussion among both participants and observers of conflict.

Certain factors suggest an inherent logic of its own for urban conflict, conferring on it a specific driving force in relation to the social structure.

First, the frequency with which protest movements arise and the areas of

consequence they touch upon can be explained by the amplitude of *the crisis in the urban situation*. Hence, there is nothing surprising in the fact that protest has been more frequent and more virulent in France and Italy, where the housing crisis is acute. Similarly, as shown with respect to different redevelopment projects, *the structural importance of the interests involved* goes a long way to explaining the effects of a movement on urban affairs.

An important part is also played by *the extent of neighbourhood activity* in encouraging the development of urban conflict and in influencing its continuing vitality. This exists in Belgium, Holland, Britain and Italy to such an extent as to further those contacts, discussions and exchanges of information that are necessary for the emergence of any collective activity. The attachment of residents to their own particular area helps in cultivating a solidarity which encourages collective resistance to any transformation that would deprive the area of some of its activities or inhabitants. The difficulties experienced in drumming up any massive resistance to redevelopment projects in Paris may be explained partly by the almost total lack of neighbourhood collective activities, undermined by the various forms through which the state interferes in Paris affairs.

One fundamental factor which affects the nature of protest and the various directions that it may take is *the characteristics of the machinery of the state* in the particular country. The protest behaviour of urban-dwellers and the final resolution of conflict depends to a substantial extent on the kind of relationship which exists between central and local authorities, the political orientation of the dominant establishment and the degree with which the political system allows open expression. In those countries where the municipal authorities have real autonomy and an appreciable margin of manoeuvre in the economic and political field (such as in Britain, Belgium and Holland), local conflicts are free to blossom. Concessions may be obtained from the municipal authorities, particularly when, as in the case where local councils are held by the left, they draw their support from a working-class electorate. Such councils are furthermore strongly inclined to seek the support of the local populace in one way or another, and encourage facilities to promote discussion, while tending to favour the participation of the various groups involved in sorting out those issues in dispute. This being so, they favour the emergence of participationist movements whilst leaving the field open to allow the partial resolution of issues raised during conflict. When, in contrast, the public institutions at local level do not have the necessary means or authority, conflict can rarely be channelled at a local level and soon comes up against the central state authority. This is one factor that prevents protest from achieving its ends; the situation in France is illustrative of this state of affairs.

*The principles governing workers' action* have a considerable influence on the characteristics of urban movements. Where the labour movement is heavily integrated, and where, above all, institutional methods are used in resolving disputes and the process of negotiation occupies a predominant position, urban conflict is by and large run on participationist lines. Such is the case in

Belgium and, to some extent, Britain. Where the labour movement retains a high degree of autonomy and before everything takes a militant stand on demands (as in France and Italy), urban conflict also tends to be just as militant, though, beyond this, the forms of action and demand militancy embodied by the labour movement is reflected in urban protest. Thus in Italy industrial disputes were the original scene of direct forms of action on a wide scale aimed at putting the workers' demands into actual practice.

In this respect the situation in the Netherlands is unusual. Labour's institutions here are the most integrated of any country in Europe, and action is less militant than elsewhere; the existence of urban conflict thus runs against the grain. The explanation behind such conflict apparently lies in other factors, and in particular in a wide tradition of revolt against authority on the part of Dutch youth that can be traced back to the Provo movement of 1966-9.

A further explanatory factor behind the nature of urban conflict is the extent to which *a portion of youth rejects the dominant ideology*. The 'ideological crisis' (initially among students and subsequently 'young people' as a whole) has penetrated these groups throughout Europe. Where the revolt finds no politically orientated means of expression, or where the labour movement has no highly militant stance, young people tend to express themselves in a more culturally conflictual fashion or through urban protest. Such is the case in the Netherlands, and, to a somewhat varying extent, in West Germany, where extra-parliamentary groups have been the inheritors of the student revolt of 1968 led by the SDS, the student organisation that was behind the main protests of 1967-69. In an 'open' political system and where the labour movement is highly institutionalised, the extra-parliamentary groups obtain only a limited audience within industry, and they tend to direct their activity towards other areas. Through their links with young people involved in urban conflict they succeed to some extent in aligning their political objectives and ideological critique.

In those countries where the influence of extra-parliamentary left-wing groups is relatively great, in that they have some impact on political affairs and achieve a certain hearing among the working class, the profile of urban conflict depends to a large degree on *the aims and principles of such groups*. In France, for example, some of the most influential of these organisations consider that the province of urban conflict forms a further underlying contradiction within the capitalist system, their strategy being based on the will to build up a revolutionary party that can swing part of the working class away from the reformist influence of left-wing political parties, in particular the PCF. With this in mind, they prefer to direct their attention towards the workers and do not take any great part in urban protest. Their experiences within this area (such as in squatter activity) have not been sufficiently intense to influence other areas of conflict in any significant manner. Extra-parliamentary groups in Italy have always laid stress on socialising the struggle and extending worker contestation to the whole sphere of social organisation. While, as in France, they seek to undermine the influence of the

Communist Party within the working class by encouraging the autonomy of the proletariat, this should, in their estimation, be undertaken on all protest fronts in society. They have thus stamped Italian urban conflict with their mark by contributing to a wider application of direct forms of action.

Furthermore, and lastly, the nature and scope of *the social and political crisis* as it occurs in each individual country gives urban conflict its own particular form and situation. It is in those countries where the crisis is most profound (France and in Italy), that one observes the most extreme militant demands as regards the 'contradictions' within the urban structure. In France this crisis manifests itself in a vigorous oppositional trend and finds primary expression at a directly political level by the adoption of the *Programme Commun*, together with the widespread sympathy given to left-wing parties – the left almost obtained an overall majority in the recent presidential elections. In Italy, on the other hand, the political system is in complete deadlock, with governments following one after the other, while the affairs of the state are further paralysed by the economic crisis. The margin of activity left open to opposition parties in parliament is no less wide. Not only is the crisis political, but more than in France it hits social affairs. The workers take an inventive and highly militant stand, while throughout society collective action grows as inconsistencies are exacerbated. Such is the context within which urban conflict in Italy has an impact and virulence that is beyond comparison with the situation in other countries.

#### NOTES

1. We have made use of the following: *Belgium: Contradictions* 1974; *Bulletins of l'Agence Sherbequoise d'Information*; *France*: Castells 1972; Castells *et al.*, forthcoming; Huet *et al.*, n.d.; Nhuan 1975; *Autrement* no. 6; *Place* no. 3; *Italy*: Cardillo *et al.* 1974; Daolio 1974; Ferarotti 1971; Pergola 1974; *Il Diritto alla Casa* 1973; *Netherlands*: Beck 1974; *United Kingdom*: Bailey 1973; Bowen 1971; Clinard 1971; Pickvance 1975; Sklair 1975; *Community Action Magazine*; *West Germany*: Grossmann 1971; Hauserat Frankfurt, 1974; Wawrzyn and Kramer 1974.
2. *Confédération Nationale du Logement*, previously *Confédération Nationale des Locataires*. This is a nationally organised group for defending tenants' interests and, more recently, also those of apartment owner-occupiers (in blocks run by single property developers). Its policy revolves around encouraging government action on low-rent accommodation. Its principle activists are French Communist Party members.
3. *Sindacato Unitario Nazionale di Inquilini e Assegnatari* (ex-UNIA) organises on a national level rentpayers of public and semi-public housing. It has long been fighting for the expansion of public authority housing and a reform of housing policy in Italy. Its principal activists are militants from the Italian Communist Party.
4. This demand is of some importance as it calls in question the differences in the fare rates applied in the 'inner Paris' area itself and the outer suburbs, as well as the fact that it is the worker who has to bear the cost of journeys between his home and his work.
5. The developer of this office block in the centre of London wanted to let the whole building to a single tenant for office accommodation, and left it standing empty for many years. It was occupied by over 100 people wishing to draw attention to the scandal of unoccupied dwellings.
6. An extra-parliamentary political group that is very active in the urban movement; its main line has, under various forms, always been to stress spontaneous action and proletarian autonomy both inside and outside the work situation.

7. An extra-parliamentary political group that is no longer in existence, though it had some following in the working class during 1970/71.
8. An extra-parliamentary group led by militants from the *Gauche Prolétarienne*, of Maoist inspiration.
9. These are currently being drastically revised, as a direct reaction to squatting (editor's note, C.J.C.).
10. A mass rentpayers' organisation in Milan which has been active in leading the main urban protest campaigns within the city. Its contribution to the Italian urban movement has been of prime importance, as, through a series of policy documents, it drew up a line of action which was to be taken up by several action committees from other urban centres. It is directed primarily by militants of *Avanguardia Operata* (an extra-parliamentary group, strong in Milan) and has recently undergone an internal split within its ranks.
11. The CUB: mass-orientated plant-level bodies led by *Avanguardia Operata* with the aim of fusing together the economic and political dimensions of the workers' struggle.
12. The effects of the '865 Law' are the subject of some debate. The unions would have it that it represents a substantial victory, while in the eyes of the extra-parliamentary left it serves no lasting purposes.
13. The Gamist movement (*Groupes d'Action Municipale*) was actively supported by the PSU and the *Parti Socialiste* itself, its action being based essentially on the theme of control at a municipal level and in the urban environment.



# II *Political Exchange and Collective Identity in Industrial Conflict*

ALESSANDRO PIZZORNO

The purpose of this article is to explore whether the various events which followed the sudden increase in wages of the years 1968–70 in the main industrial countries can be accounted for by one general theoretical framework. Do the very high wage claims, the intensity of conflicts, their new forms and the new types of claim put forward, the increase in the political involvement of the unions, the spread of unionisation and of social movements into new groups of the population belong to a common pattern? Are they to be explained as a consequence of some structural trend or as a temporary alteration of the systems of political and of labour representation?

In the first section we shall present a theoretical framework. In the second we shall attempt to show how it can account for a certain cyclical pattern of industrial conflict, while also drawing attention to certain underlying historical trends which prepared the events emerging during this particular wave of conflicts.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF EXCHANGE

The question of how union action influences wages is unsettled in the economics literature, and we shall not try to settle it here. We shall rather try to draw attention to an analytical distinction which has not been made as clearly and systematically as it should be, and which is particularly useful in the explanation of the events under consideration. It concerns the different kinds of exchange taking place in the labour market. That there is a difference between the market (the atomistic market) on which individual actors, without combination or collusion, enter into a relationship which Beatrice Webb called individual exchange, and a market of groups or organisations, where collective bargaining is the rule, is a well-accepted tenet in our field of study. But this is the only major difference taken into consideration, and usually in order to measure the union wage differential, that is, the advantage

for workers of collective bargaining over individual bargaining. But when real situations are studied, it is easily recognised that factors other than those stemming directly from the relationship between employers and employee are at work. There may be legislative measures, long-term strategies of the unions within the political system, or the intervention and policies of governments. They are generally called 'political factors', and are accepted as more or less important. No systematic theory of them exists, though sometimes a wish that it should exist is expressed (Banks 1974; Clegg 1976).

## HOW THE POLITICAL RESOURCES OF LABOUR ARE EXCHANGED IN A MARKET SITUATION

A framework for a theory of these 'political aspects' of the labour market could be devised by considering them as elements of a system of exchanges analagous to the systems of individual exchange and of collective bargaining, but distinct from them.<sup>1</sup>

In the individual exchange, as described by the classical economists, reward is obtained in exchange for work. Competition for more reward induces more individual effort (or sacrifice), and this increases production, finally resulting in a universal advantage. The private vice of greed, as Mandeville said, becomes the public virtue of social productivity. The obverse of effort is exit: the weapon of the individual worker is to quit, if he can (i.e., if the labour market is tight).

In the market of collective bargaining, the weapon of the organised worker is the strike, or other forms of interruption of production. What the employer is paying more for is the assurance of continuity of work. As the union is the agent capable of organising the strike, it is also, by converse, the agent capable of ensuring the continuity of work. That is, it performs a function of social control, substituting negotiation for command by the employer or the management which represents the other form of social control in the organisation of production. As the critics of the Webbs have rightly pointed out, collective bargaining is *not* individual bargaining for many. Rather it is a form of joint regulation of the terms of work (Flanders 1968), that is, a normative process, through which the unions together with the management become a kind of private government. This, together with the derived use of the threat to strike instead of the threat to quit, the existence of a monopoly of the sellers of labour, marks the main difference between the first and second types of exchange. In other words, the presence of a negotiator like the union is important for the new function it performs and for the autonomy of the organisation which it implies, rather than for the new position gained by the sellers of labour on the market. But the presence of an organisation is essential. It makes possible, as we shall see, control over the temporal dimension, that is, a capacity for strategy.

To sum up, while the individual exchange induces effort, collective bargaining induces compliance with negotiated regulation. While the social reward deriving from the individual exchange is in terms of social pro-

ductivity (as a consequence of its inducing more effort), the social reward deriving from collective bargaining is in terms of organisational benefits: continuity of performance, compliance, predictability, and the establishment of rights. It must be stressed that this distinction is analytical. In any concrete situation the individual exchange (work against reward) is obviously never absent. Moreover, the collective bargaining exchange still takes place within the framework of the demand for and the supply of labour.

But let us now take an example of industrial action which has been rather frequent in recent times. A factory decides to close. Although the market power of the workers affected is then by definition nil, since there is no demand for their services, they or their union take an action which obtains some total or partial revision of the management decision. How is this possible? The answer is often in terms of political pressure or political power exercised by the union. Some gain has been obtained in exchange for something 'political'. What kind of exchange is then taking place here? What kind of goods are being traded in this political market? While in the atomistic market more gains were obtained in exchange for more effort, and in the collective bargaining in exchange for continuity of work, in the political market the resource given in exchange may be called consensus or support. An actor (generally the government) which has goods to give is ready to trade them in exchange for social consensus with an actor who can threaten to withdraw that consensus (or, which is more or less the same, to endanger order) unless he receives the goods he needs. In a situation of pure collective bargaining, industrial action means threat to withdraw continuity of work. The exchange becomes political when the threat is withdrawal of the wider social consensus or social order.

The resource in the hands of workers in the case of political exchange is regulated according to completely different criteria from the case of collective bargaining. Market power in the latter case depends on the demand for labour. The value of the consensus resource depends instead on completely different circumstances. A strike by all the workers of an employer or a particular industry is the same whether the absolute number is one thousand or one hundred thousand. But in the case of political action affecting social consensus, the size of the group concerned is very important. While a small range of forms of action is available in collective bargaining, a much wider variety, with varying impact on consensus, is available in the political exchange. Electoral effects differ from urban disorder and again from organisational disruption; and the position of a group of workers may be such that one type of action may have irrelevant consequences (such as electoral shifts in an unmodifiable electoral distribution) while another may be very important (for example the chain of consequences from a small organisational disruption). These, and other similar circumstances, are the material of political exchange. They represent important assets in the hands of groups that decide to take industrial action, bear no necessary relation to the demand for the product of these workers, and are thus external to the market on which collective bargaining takes place.

The different distribution of resources (or, in other words, the different bases of power) also has an effect on the identity of the actors taking action on this market. While, in the collective bargaining situation, the union was the obvious authorised representative; the same is not necessarily true on the political market. Nor is it true that the structure of occupations and of production are the criteria by which collective interests may be identified. Since consensus or withdrawal of it may unite or divide groups and categories on different bases from the organisation of production, the process of formation of collective identities will be less systematically predictable.

On the other hand, the fact that the union is not the only natural representative of interest here affects its actions. It can be threatened as an organisation by the formation of new collective identities and it may or may not decide to represent them; in any case its action will be influenced, and this will constitute another factor distorting the simple pursuit of the maximisation of immediate gains for the members by the union apparatus.

To sum up, a situation of political exchange differs from one of collective bargaining because: (a) benefits are obtained against a threat to social order or social consensus, while in collective bargaining they are exchanged against a threat to the regularity of work; (b) market power is a function of the need for consensus, not of the demand for labour; (c) several actors may concur with the unions in 'mediating consensus' (political parties being of course the main example).

#### HOW THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND POLITICAL EXCHANGE CAN HAVE DESTABILISING EFFECTS

The discrepancy between the ways in which interest identification and representation takes place on the market of collective bargaining and on the political market respectively, might be seen as the main cause of destabilisation in an industrial relations system. It may also offer a general theoretical background for a reformulation of the commonsense view that inflation is caused by pressures by powerful social groups to raise their share of income, and by the consequent monetary expansion decided by governments which bow to those pressures. It is not the pressures as such which are destabilising, but the fact that the amount of power which a group may exercise is not a function of the contribution it makes to production. (Capitalists, in the classic model of atomistic capitalism, can be considered to contribute through the 'sacrifice' of present consumption.)

Can this be the whole story? Apart from the arguments of the alternative theory which maintains that the main cause of inflation is the capacity of oligopolistic firms to administer prices and then to give in to union claims, the objection to the foregoing interpretation is that it does not make allowances for variations. If the inflation which grows out of political pressure on public expenditure is a 'perfectly anticipated' one, then an equilibrium is restored and the contrasting pressures are either held at bay or deluded thanks to

money illusion. If the case is of disequilibrium inflation, something new must have happened which has removed or weakened some previously working mechanism of equilibrium, which must be assumed to work again if inflation is to be brought back to equilibrium. Or, from another point of view:

The mere existence of pressure on the government to inflate does not guarantee that inflation will occur. Variations in the monetary expansion supplied in response to a given level of pressure must be explained as well (Gordon 1975:804).

It is not enough to say that equilibrium can be restored by simply increasing unemployment sufficiently. Unless we think that the full employment policy was not grounded in political considerations, but was simply the effect of economic market mechanism, we must accept that political forces were interested in supporting it. For the creation of unemployment to be again a possible strategy, other forces must have emerged to balance these previous ones, or these must themselves have changed direction. Being a means to weaken one of the actors on the political market, unemployment has to be created by policies supported by social interests, or reached through mediation. In any case it is the outcome of some political exchange. Both stabilisation and destabilisation mechanisms need to be understood also through an analysis of the political market, which has then to be seen as a system capable of equilibrium and disequilibrium states. In order to locate these mechanisms, we have to pay attention to just two simple facts. The first is that in an exchange situation the two actors take into consideration not only their immediate short-run interest, but also their future goals. And the second is that in the exchange taking place on the labour market in general, and on the political level of the labour market in particular, there is a third figure as negotiating agent: the union. The union is an actor in its own right, not only developing its own specific interest, but being capable of carrying out a strategy, that is a succession of intertemporal decisions in which present action is evaluated in terms of its consequences for future goals.

Of course, the degree to which a union may be capable of developing a strategy may be very low. Traditionally the union was seen as the agent in charge of the immediate interests of the working class, while the political parties were in charge of their long-term goals. But, first, this is much less true now than it was before. Second, what we want to do here is to trace a dimension on which the union's positions may be seen as varying and which at the same time differentiates the representatives from the represented. Union functions and union goals are thus linked; but we shall here examine them in turn.

## HOW EQUILIBRIUM OPERATES IN THE POLITICAL MARKET THROUGH THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM GOALS

In order to show how the difference between short-term and long-term interests may have an impact on wage claim behaviour we may take the classical analysis of Hicks (1973: 64 ff.), who distinguishes two typical situations: the pre-Keynesian and the Keynesian. In the first, workers in cycle-sensitive sectors of the economy were in a position to obtain higher wages during boom periods, while employers were in a position to impose lower wages or to fire workers during slumps. But neither happened. Workers moderated their claims and employers refrained from firing or from excessive toughness because both expected reciprocity during the lean periods. Each actor, that is, when it had to make choices took into consideration not only the opportunity for present gains, but also the future consequences of this choice for long-term interest. It is implied that such behaviour was made possible either by a relationship of trust between employer and employee, of the sort that we may call paternalistic, or by a more contractual guarantee where a union intervened. In contrast, in a Keynesian situation, where expectations of continuous growth operate, the workers in the expanding sectors of the economy are able to obtain continuous increases in wages. Workers in the low-productivity sectors see their relative position worsening and step up their claims:

Wages rise in the non-expanding industries, not because of labour scarcity, but because of unfairness; because the workers in the non-expanding industries feel that they are getting left behind (*ibid.*: 71 ff.).

In other words alteration of the relativities between categories of workers is an impingement on the fairness of the system of industrial relations which sets loose a chain reaction of claims. The system is under control, that is in equilibrium, only when industrial relations are recognised as fair, which means that wage differentials are kept as they are expected to be. What is implied in Hicks's analysis is the existence of two patterns of action. The first leads to choices of industrial action taken after the future state of the system has been considered. The second leads to the maximisation of short-run gains. The first is possible when some control of future states of the system, irrespective of the institution ensuring it, is thought to exist. The second is possible when no control of future states of the system is workable. By implication it is also possible to say that in the first case a form of under-exploitation of short-term market power is being exercised. We shall see later the significance of this implication. Hicks's analysis has an explicit sociological basis. But there are similar implications in purer economic explanations of inflationary phenomena, such as the monetarist one. When perfectly anticipated inflation is distinguished from disequilibrium inflation

the first state might be defined as the one where the behaviour of economic actors is controlled by some assurance about future states of the system; when expectations are not met (or money illusion is revealed) the behaviour of economic actors is bound to lead to disequilibrium. The assumption that economic action is oriented by expectations entails the idea that present action is controlled by higher or lower degrees of assurance about future states.

A similar assumption is entailed also in what we may call the 'frustration hypothesis'. In it, 'it is argued that people come to feel relatively deprived when the rate of growth of their real incomes is low relative to expectations, these being based on their own earlier experience' (Laidler and Park in 1975: 764). Those who apply it to recent events note how in several countries, towards the mid-1960s, the regular growth of the previous fifteen years was interrupted. The frustration which ensued caused a response in terms of militancy: 'A reasonable interpretation of this strike wave might well be that it embodied a reaction of disappointed anticipations – ones of continuing improvements in living standards' (Turner 1972: 88). Again, we may say that disappointed anticipations follow the illusion of being able to control the course of economic events until this illusion is shattered; moderation in claims is seen as functional to the control of future states of the system; afterwards it is abandoned.

In all these analyses, the distinction between short-run and long-run interests is used to show that control, or guarantee, of future objectives induces moderation. This is a plausible assumption only if one thinks that unwanted consequences of one's claims might endanger one's future condition. In order for that to be possible, two circumstances are needed: that the subject securing its claims is large enough to affect the system (for instance, by provoking a chain reaction of claims); and/or that the subject has a stake in co-ordinating claims from a wide range of interest-bearing groups which might be harmed by the excessive achievement of one of them. For the present we shall assume that such conditions hold.

## HOW EQUILIBRIUM OPERATES IN THE POLITICAL MARKET THROUGH THE ROLE OF THE UNIONS

This brings us to a discussion of the specific role of the union as a negotiating agent, which we have here been regarding as a component of the mechanism ensuring equilibrium on the political market. In Hicks's pre-Keynesian case the perception by workers that some guarantee about future states of the system existed, was grounded on some trust relationship between employer and employees. (In this case the employer acted in some sense as the representative of the workers, to the extent that they were considered as members of an institution. The workers had two roles, one as sellers of labour on the labour market, the other as members of the firm as an institution.) When the contractual relationship passes through a union, it might be said that the workers are placing in it a similar kind of trust, in the sense that they

trust the union's interpretation of what the consequences of a present action may be for their future interest. In these conditions behaviour of moderation, that is an under-exploitation of short-run market power, may occur, because this is either in the interest of the union as an organisation or in the interest of the future situation of the workers (D. Smith 1976:38). But also in this second case, it must be assumed either that the union is capable of convincing its members that their own 'true' interests are better served if they moderate their claims, or that the union organisation is strong enough to resist its members' pressure to obtain more immediately.

In both cases the union is seen as an actor on its own in the exchange situation, capable of autonomously defining the ends towards which collective action should be directed. It has a preference function of its own, which, from a certain point, tends to diverge from that of its members (*ibid.*). But, while it seems clear what the interests of the employer and employee might be in the bargaining situation, how can the interests of the union be defined? What is the nature of the gains that such an actor may receive, and of the losses that it may suffer?

To answer this question we need to return to our concept of political exchange. The gains that the union may receive in it are in terms of political power. It is true that the unions' own preference function exists already in the situation of collective bargaining; they can fear, for instance, that excessive wage gains might have negative employment effects and/or might increase members' expectations so that future settlements become increasingly difficult for the union to achieve. But the gains in terms of power which can be secured on the political market are intrinsic to the union as an organisation.

Moreover there is a symmetry in the distinctions between, on the one hand short-term and long-term gains, and on the other benefits for the represented and powers for the representative; power means, or should mean, capacity to obtain benefits in the future. So, when the organisation which represents the workers becomes more powerful – by receiving new positions of power instead of immediate benefits for its members – it is by this token strengthening its capacity for obtaining future benefits. But the possibility of a gap between the interest of the represented and the interests of the representative exists in the sacrifice of immediate benefits for the sake of future gains, when the union has the monopoly of legitimate interpretation of what is best, of what constitutes the 'true', that is long-term, interests of its members. In choosing power rather than immediate gains, it acquires positions which allow it more freedom of interpretation. The power of obtaining future benefits then becomes power over its own members. When the union delivers the consensus, or the moderation, of its members, in exchange for more power, it is not possible for the members to control gains which might flow for them from the use in future of the power which has been obtained. The exchange takes place on the assumption of a coincidence of interests between the organisation and its members, between the representative and the represented – which is, as we have seen, a false assumption, not so much because of imperfections in union democracy, but because of the interpretation gap produced by the neg-

otiation process.

This situation is made more acute by the fact that the state is the other actor in the political exchange. The benefits for its members that a union can secure from the state are generally of a long-term nature, and thus much harder to evaluate than those obtainable from collective bargaining. Whether a good bargain or a bad bargain has been struck on the political market is a hard thing for anyone to judge, let alone the ordinary rank and file. The interpretation gap is then very wide.

## TWO SOURCES OF DISEQUILIBRIUM

As a result of this leeway in the mediation function, of this freedom of the union from its members, which means power over them, a mechanism of equilibrium is at work. Claims are controlled and short-term market power unexploited. But, clearly, it is a mechanism which has limits. When the interpretation gap becomes too wide, when the 'power of' bears no relation to the 'power over', and the objectives of the rank and file appear too distorted by the action of the organisation, then the danger of a breakdown of representation is approaching. The same may happen when new groups which are not, or do not feel themselves to be, represented as such in the existing system express a collective will to be represented. A process of formation of collective identity sets in, which tends to disrupt the pattern of mediation. Whether the union resists this process may depend partly on the tenacity of the groups concerned, but partly on the use that the union can make of the growing militancy in order to increase its own power. The knowledge of the conditions under which that capacity or that willingness change will allow us to predict the success of the mechanisms of equilibrium.

We have identified two dimensions on which variations seem meaningful for an understanding of how the system is controlled: that relative to the degree of control of the entry of new collective identities; and that relative to the degree of control of contractual gains through political exchanges, which generally expresses itself in the form of control over decentralised bargaining by a centralised strategy. The factors which account for these variations will now be identified. We shall then be able to distinguish different types of industrial relations system, in different countries and in different periods, as well as phases or cycles of industrial action and class conflict.

The two types of control just described, that over new entries and that over the dispersion of decisions, may be considered to be the two main modes of operation of equilibrium on the political market. But the extent to which the political market is operating should also be considered as a variable. It varies over time and from country to country.

## THE HISTORICAL SEQUENCE OF THE TYPES OF MARKET

That the initial distinction between three types of exchange was analytical has already been stressed; in any concrete situation the three types of exchange

relationship co-exist. But we may also say that there is a historical sequence in the predominance of each type of relationship. At first, individual exchange predominated and covered practically the whole of the labour market. This continued in most of the countries under consideration until about the latter half of the nineteenth century, when collective bargaining began to develop; not replacing individual exchange but regulating it (see Flanders 1968). Political exchange supplemented collective bargaining almost from the beginning, but its most rapid development took place after the First World War and then again after the Second, though not to the same extent in all industrial countries. Its developments can be followed through the changes in the dimensions and in the nature of the action of the main actors on this market. On the side of the unions, the creation of central bodies (federation, confederation, national council, *Bund*, etc) may be considered an elementary indicator of the emergence of a situation which implies exchange between political actors. An even more precise definition of the process which leads from collective bargaining to political exchange can be found by examining the changing effects of industrial action. In addition to the direct result of bargaining (wage increases, new work rules, etc.), such action may have secondary effects analogous to the external economies of decisions taken on the market in ordinary goods: a demonstration which brings urban traffic to a halt, a strike which harms the users of a public service, a union strategy which has an impact on election results. In the conditions of modern industrial society such secondary effects are becoming increasingly frequent. As many observers have stressed (See Shorter and Tilly 1974) the nature of industrial action itself has been affected by awareness that these effects have become important: it becomes more a demonstration and less a blow.

The creation of national associations on the side of the employers could also be traced as indicators of a growing presence on the political market. But a better guide to the extent to which political exchange takes place is to be found in the type of relationships which are formed between employers and the state and the systematic interdependencies which exist among the units of the economy. The state activities which generate a political market begin with such normative interventions on the labour market as general minimum wage laws, fixing of maximum working hours, provision of pensions, unemployment and sickness benefits. Next come economic policies of full employment, incomes policies, social contracts of various kinds, etc. More abstractly, and in the terms set out earlier in this paper, the state increasingly becomes the main structure in charge of the guarantee of long-term goals. The individual finds in the social security system, in the health services, in unemployment benefits and the like the kind of assurance of future well-being that formerly he had to look for in his family, in his guild, in voluntary associations or in his own prudence. This makes the state the obvious 'other side' in the bargain through which present restraint is traded for future security. The firm too increasingly becomes a source of future security, since it is in its interest to strengthen the institutional ties that hold the worker to it; seniority rights, pension rights, and the like are also resources which are taken

into account by the workers in making inter-temporal decisions. We may therefore say that the extent to which this function of guaranteeing future security is taken on by the state or by the firm may become one index among others for predicting the influence of political exchange in an industrial relations system.

In general, we may say that the difference in the extent to which the political market impinges upon the positions of the workers, the unions and the employers, is the main variable in distinguishing among national industrial relations systems. An interesting observation by Shorter and Tilly seems to confirm this rule. Before the First World War, the types of industrial action (form of strikes, frequency, degree of participation) were very similar in all industrial countries irrespective of their political regime. After that, they tend to differ from country to country and assume three or four distinctive patterns. The First World War also saw the first significant intensification of government-union relationships. The different patterns of this relationship cause entire industrial relations systems to differ. The American and Canadian systems, which are those where the political influence has been felt later, are also those where the form of industrial action has changed least, and, incidentally, where industrial conflicts are at the highest.

### THIS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK COMPARED WITH OTHERS

To sum up the main points of the argument so far: industrial relations are less and less limited to collective bargaining. 'Political factors' become everywhere – but in different ways – more important. They should not be seen as exogenous, unpredictable forces, but as obeying rules analogous to those prevailing in the system of collective bargaining. Recourse to political resources may produce disequilibrating effects, but since it responds to the rules of a system of exchanges, it tends to follow mechanisms of equilibrium. The main agent of equilibrium is the organisation in charge of the mediation function, generally the union. The union, being a standing organisation, develops interests of its own and a capacity for strategy, which means a capacity to evaluate future as well as present goals. The interest in increasing the power of the organisation tends to coincide with the preference to forgo present gains of the workers in exchange for future gains. The function of the union is thus to give an inter-temporal dimension to the formation of labour's claims, but at the same time to conceal the possibility that expectations might not be met. There is here something similar to the workers' dilemma as expressed in Lancaster's model of the inefficiency of capitalism (1973: 1095):

Should [the workers] forgo present consumption by handing over part of total income to the capitalists? If they do not, they will obtain no higher consumption in the future. If they do, they have no guarantee that the capitalists will actually invest sufficient of this income to bring about the desired level of increase.

This dilemma refers to the investment function of capitalists (or bureaucrats). With regard to the mediation function of union leaders (or in general of workers' representatives) one may substitute 'gains' for 'consumption', 'power' for 'income', 'union leaders' for 'capitalists', and 'power accumulation' for 'capital accumulation'. Finally, it should also be pointed out that, in the absence of unions workers' power is simply expropriated by the capitalists; while through the activity of the unions the under-exploitation of market power may mean abstinence (that is, restraint in the use of potential power) without the guarantee that this currently unused power will be exercised in the future.

To return to our scheme: not always has the union the capacity or the willingness to exercise restraint. Dispersion of power and formation of new collective identities represent conditions which may either force the union leadership to modify its position or create alternative centres of power, within or without the unions, preventing the mechanism of equilibrium to work. These conditions may appear in different ways and different phases, and this will be examined in the following section.

But before going into a more specific analysis, let us consider the advantages of this general framework, compared with others. Theoretical frameworks which do not take into consideration political factors, such as the recent attempt by Clegg, may be very useful as a first systemisation but imply more comprehensive ones, as Clegg himself has acknowledged (1976: 118-9). On the other side, we have such a major empirical and historical work as that by Shorter and Tilly, based on the general hypothesis that a 'political' factor is always at work (at least in France) when industrial action emerges. But the distinction between the 'political' and 'contractual' situations has to be defined, and their logic spelt out, if we want to generate more systematic prepositions, even if they do not lend themselves easily to empirical tests. We shall here look into more detail at some very general theoretical assumptions held, more or less explicitly, by most analyses of inflation and of industrial relations in general; for instance those concerning 'social comparisons'.

To put it in an economist's terms, these rest on the

hypothesis that the percentage rate of wage increases demanded and obtained in the great majority of settlements in any particular period are imitative in character: they are motivated by the desire to maintain the position of any particular group of workers relative to other groups, rather than to secure some absolute improvement in the standard of living (Kaldor 1976: 709).

The idea of a rigidity of wage differentials is also behind Hicks's idea of fairness, to which we have already referred. Kaldor affirms that 'there have been a number of studies' confirming this hypothesis but does not give the references. So we do not know which they are and we are led to think that the idea is based more on common sense and on 'British' union rhetoric than on data. But common sense (and the observation that in other countries' union

rhetoric this point comes up much more rarely) should also tell us that this motivation is dependent on certain conditions: probably, when the industrial relations system is a long-standing and well-established one (Britain, for instance) as opposed to one which has just undergone a period of change, major migration, etc., that prevent occupational categories from knowing exactly where they stand in relation to others (Italy, for instance).

The 'communication-contagion' hypothesis is, as it were, the activist version of the previous one:

the post-war proliferation of mass media, particularly television, exposed union leaders and members everywhere to the U.S. student and racial unrest of the mid-1960s (Gordon 1975: 819).

Only slightly different is the theory of an 'aspiration gap' which would increase because of the increase in communication, education, advertising, etc. (Panić 1976: 5ff.). It is certainly true that there are needs, as Keynes said, 'that we feel only if their satisfaction lifts us above, makes us above, makes us feel superior to, our fellows'. More precisely, it could be said that social comparison is a necessary component of the evaluation process preceding human choices. But it is difficult to see logically why the inducement to greed (private vice), which is the effect of all social comparison, is stronger when an individual compares himself with one thousand other individuals than, say, with twenty. As we have mentioned in the foregoing analysis the meaningful change is not in the width (amplitude) of the comparison, but in the circumstance that this is made now among collectivities (groups, occupational categories etc.) and that the action which ensues takes the form of more collective pressure, not more individual effort. And this happens, not because of an increase in communications but because in the atomistic situation the individual had no control of the future consequences of his action. Organisation developed in order to serve that kind of control (a process similar to that which brought about the oligopolistic markets of goods in order to control prices). This brings the analysis back to where it belongs – to institutions and to power relations rather than to expectations, aspirations and other either vague or tautological psychological concepts. It also allows us to put in its context the observation made by many authors of a new fact which is important, but not sufficient by itself, to explain what is new in the system of industrial relations. We refer to what Panić calls 'coercive power', and which should rather be called 'indirect power' grounded in increased interdependence within the economic system. While it seems true, at least at first glance, that today increasing division of labour is leading to 'sectarianism and vested interests centred around specific activities: social oases with weak links within a tightly interwoven and complex social and economic framework' (ibid.: 10), it should be remembered that Durkheim had argued exactly the opposite point: that the interdependence provoked by the division of labour leads to organic solidarity. And observing that this phenomenon is linked with the increase in the capital/labour ratio, Arthur

Ross (1961: 63 ff.) argued that one of its effects would be increased tranquillity and co-operation in industrial relations, because the workers could be bought off. All this means that it is not the division of labour and interdependence as such which determine the stepping-up of claims on resources, but rather the lack of effectiveness of the representation system to account for an acceptable (or of course an imposed) redistribution.

Finally, all these and many other theories assume that things will continue in the same direction in a kind of cumulative loosening of the social fabric. There is no doubt that such trends can be detected. But we cannot ignore the fact that disorder and order of some sort coexist; that after unrest comes rest and *vice versa*; that there are waves of industrial conflict with peaks and troughs; and that we therefore need to have some means of explaining these facts as well as the escalation that has occurred since the late 1960s.

## WAVES OF CONFLICTS

A well-known article by Albert Rees opened with the observation that 'it has long been recognised that there are cycles of strikes and that they are probably related to the business cycle. If the forces which tend to create a pattern of regularity in strike fluctuation can be identified, it is important to do so. Unless we learn to understand this pattern, cyclical changes in the level of strikes may be mistaken for permanent changes in the economic, social or psychological determinants of industrial conflict' (Rees 1952:371). Already in 1921 Hansen had identified 'cycles of strikes'. And a few years after Rees's article, two controversial articles by Bernstein, proposing an elaborate theory based upon almost a century of evidence from American labour history, started a debate which is probably not yet definitely settled.

The study of the relationship between the business cycle and union growth has an even longer history, since it started with the work of the Wisconsin school. This history is well analysed in Bain and Elsheikh's book *Union Growth and the Business Cycle* (1976: ch. 2). Their own research, based on data drawn from four countries (United States, Australia, United Kingdom and Sweden), is rather conclusive in showing how the rate of change of prices, the rate of change of wages, the level and/or the rate of change of unemployment and the level of union density determine the rate of change of union membership.

Both these lines of inquiry are based on the hypothesis that the following causal sequence holds:

State of the business cycle —————> relative position of the workers in the economic structure —————> opportunity for the workers to gain by unionising (or striking) —————> unionisation (or strikes).

Such a causal sequence, based on the assumption of a well-informed and rationally choosing individual, is certainly plausible and can yield relatively

good results, as many econometric tests seem to prove. But it neglects two variables which are both important in themselves (as phenomena to be explained) and as explanatory factors: the institutional structure and the form that union action and industrial conflict may take. What these studies in any case undoubtedly show, is the existence of fluctuations, of peaks and troughs (which does not mean regular cycles) in the intensity of industrial conflict and in the pace of union growth.

Shorter and Tilly, in their path-breaking study on more than a century of strikes in France (1974), are able not only to identify, from 1830 until 1968, ten peak years – 1833, 1840, 1869–70, 1893, 1899–1900, 1906, 1919–20, 1936, 1947–8, 1968–; and to calculate that from 1890 to 1960 the peak years account for 38 per cent of the total strikes of the period (stretching the period until 1968 would substantially increase the quota of the peak years); but also to show that there are important differences between disputes which take place during a wave of conflicts (around the peak years) and those which takes place outside the wave. They differ in length – ‘after 1900 strikes during wave years became longer than those during surrounding years, evidence that the concentration of forces increased the resolution of the participants to stick it through’ (143); the number of participants in the average strike was greater during wave years than during non-wave years; the number of establishments involved was also larger, as well as the percentage of workers in a given plant participating in the average strike; and ‘finally, the participation of unions during wave years was usually higher than in non-wave years’ (144).

Given such evidence, and the evidence of the post-1968 period which we have specifically studied, and using the conceptual framework we have outlined in the previous section, we shall attempt to identify the mechanisms which account for the intensity and the latency of industrial conflict, as well as for the variations in the form of industrial action.

Before entering into the argument a few points must be made clear. First, the attempt to identify the existence of stabilising and destabilising forces in the working of the institutions does not imply that the outside (i.e. mere economic) factors are regarded as irrelevant. We have seen that their influence is confirmed, not only by common sense but also (even if not always unconditionally) by econometric tests. We only maintain that, when they operate, they pass through institutional mechanisms; they can be read as it were through the institutional script. In other words the institutional variable necessarily intervenes. Second, we do not propose here a cyclical theory of industrial or class conflict. We merely say that it is high time that attention be paid to periodic variations in certain phenomena. Otherwise, at every new upstart of a wave of conflict we shall be induced to think that we are at the verge of a revolution; and when the downswing appears, we shall predict the end of class conflict. Finally, we are not specifically interested here in what has been called ‘the political cycle’, either in the old Kaleckian meaning of this expression, or in the sense used in several recent works on the influence of elections on public spending and inflation (Nordhaus 1975; Gordon 1975). Kalecki’s argument that capitalists will eventually not accept a policy of full

employment because it will undermine their power is important because it was made so early and was also fundamentally right. But it is too rough and general to be used in specific analysis. Moreover we think that a theory of the 'political market' as it has been sketched here could use the Kaleckian case as just one of the possible cases. Similarly elections, the centre of recent studies of the political cycle, are only one of the resources with which political actors deal, albeit in certain cases the most important one.

From our conceptual framework it can be derived that periods of destabilisation and conflict appear when the unions are either unable or unwilling to exchange moderation for power, and either unable or unwilling to prevent new 'entries' and the formation of new collective identities. Historically the two phenomena often occur together, but analytically they can be examined separately.

The first case can happen in several ways. One is through a dispersal of power. In stable periods, as we have seen, the representational link is such that the agent (the union leadership) is entitled to interpret the long-term goals of its principal (the workers), and to decide the best strategy for reaching them. In exchange for such performance the union leadership is entitled to ask for a sacrifice of immediate achievements, that is restraint in claims. This brings also a reward to the union in terms of power, which it obtains in exchange for the social consensus that it ensures. But let us suppose that while the union is leading this general strategy towards long-term goals, linked with immediate moderation, some firms, enjoying favourable market situations, are willing to increase wages or other benefits. Either the union leadership follows, breaking the implicit or explicit settlement of restraint, or new localised leaderships will emerge and will negotiate the distribution of benefits made available. Uncoordinated decisions will be taken by many units and sub-units, which are less capable and less willing to take into consideration the long-term consequences of their action. (This description does not hold true for the case of company-level bargaining (of the American and also partly of the German type) with long-standing experience of security for the firm as well as for the union; but in this case the firm should be considered the normal *centre of power*.) Diffusion of claims (imitative in character), leap-frogging, and in general more conflictual situations will ensue.

But we may also imagine situations where the union itself, without previous dispersion of power, or much of it, finds it convenient to initiate and intensify its claim. This can happen when there is a change in government positions, paradoxically both when it is potentially favourable and when it is potentially unfavourable to the union's and workers' claims. In the former case, the ceiling of possible union power will be lifted, leaving void a space, as it were, for the union to enter. Since in any case it is not convenient for a government to give in immediately, either the union leadership will become more aggressive or the rank and file will feel the new opportunity and initiate action. At this point, an increase in general conflictuality is very likely to bring about a dispersion of power. (The Asquith government in Great Britain, Roosevelt in the United States, Blum in 1936 in France, the centre-left in

Italy, are only some of the possible examples of this case.) When the change in government is unfavourable to the unions, rendering them unable to guarantee future gains in exchange for present restraint, either the unions themselves or the rank and file will find it convenient to adopt an aggressive stance. In both these cases, even if it is the union which initiates action, the justification for the political exchange, legitimating more or less centralised co-ordination by the union, loses ground. Not only does restraint become pointless, but so does acceptance of a co-ordinated industrial action. Autonomy of decision-making by sub-units and possibly unofficial action become more likely.

What will be the outcome when the unions are unable or unwilling to prevent new entry at a time when the formation of new collective identities is taking place? This is the most interesting and the most general case, since the process of growing autonomy of sub-units which we have described in the previous case may be seen as following the same logic as that of new groups seeking identity and recognition. Here the logic of exchange and negotiation is unknown or abolished. The real end is non-negotiable, since it consists in the formation of the very subject which has successively to become the actor of the exchange and the bearer of gains and losses. There is a category of action which may be observed in social conflicts, that can be understood only if it is asked of them not what gains and what losses they will produce for the actors, but whether they produce solidarity or not. These are the actions connoting a process of formation of a collective identity. Here expressive conduct will replace instrumental conduct. Direct participation will be felt to be necessary since representation is excluded and trust is not yet grounded. And the Olsonian law that participation for the acquisition of collective goods is uneconomical is suspended.

Such is the general logic underlying numerous particular cases. Let us suppose that groups or categories of workers, objectively distinguishable in the organisation of production but incorporated with others in the system of representation, seek separation and autonomy. They feel, that is, that they would be more able to secure their ends if they formed a unit to handle their affairs separately. In other cases, a category formed by individuals who used to find it more convenient to rely on individualistic achievements (for example, white-collar workers, professionals) discovers the relative usefulness of pursuing certain goals collectively. In both these cases recognition and identity (or, more precisely, recognition of a common identity both on the part of others and among the participants themselves) will be the goal of the action. And its logic will follow the pattern described above. Lack of precedent, disturbance of accepted patterns, lack of trust, lack of experience in autonomous collective action and bargaining – all this will account for more aggressiveness and conflict, more participation, innovation in claims, often unprocessable by the existing system. At times, real claims will even be lacking and conflictual action will be undertaken for the simple sake of affirming the existence of the new, or the unrecognised, collective actor.

Slightly different in its origins and its consequences is the case of the

formation of collective identities for groups of people who do not have a separate identity in the organisation of production: for instance, youth, students, women, ethnic or religious or regional minorities, etc. There is no special reason why the union, or in general the system of labour representation, should be involved in the formation of this kind of collective identity. But in recent years this has in fact often been the case, probably as a consequence both of a party-parliamentary system of representation, which is incapable of recognising these types of identities, and of the relative ease with which unions can take them in hand. For this second aspect we may say that a union which is weak on the contractual level will probably be more inclined to utilise or mobilise these new identities. Here it is likely that to the traditional union claim for wage increases, new claims will be added, reflecting the unforeseen situation of these categories on the union market. The need to go to the political market will be overwhelming.

Just to give one example, to which we shall return later, let us observe what happened in May 1968 in France. There were no specific common interests between unions and the student movement. But the union had implicitly the role of being the main spokesman for any 'social' opposition, as well as being the monopolist of any large mobilisation power. It felt threatened by the student movement in this capacity. If it intervened in the situation it could help to limit political disorder (if not to restore order) while at the same time receiving in exchange gains of a traditional contractual nature. Further, the element of dispersion of power which began to be felt could be checked by a drastic centralisation of negotiations. The meeting at Grenelle achieved this.

The processes of the formation of new collective identities and of the dispersion of power may thus be seen as responsible for the destabilisation of a system of industrial relations and for the increase in claims and conflict. But they tend also to generate processes in the opposite direction, that is to have restabilising effects.

A first type of re-equilibrium process takes place when new collective identities are recognised and become a component of a new system of representation. An important historical instance was the way in which the entry of new industrial workers in several European labour movements around the turn of the century influenced union structures and transformed systems of industrial relations.

Such a process of reabsorption has two aspects. One is the transformation of the universalistic claims of the movement (the *non-negotiable* claim, based on a universalistic right, to have the new identity recognised) into sectional, corporate claims. This transformation either leads the new movement to accept the other components of the system and hence the system as a whole, or isolates it, bringing it to failure.

The second aspect is the transformation of an expressive participation, based on the assertion of a new collective identity, into an instrumental participation based on the calculation of individual gains and losses. This divides the new collectivity in two: on the one side those who still have an

interest in participating and on the other side those for whom the cost of participation is higher than its gains (which can generally be obtained without the cost of participation, following the principle of the consumption of collective goods). Since the interest of the former – much fewer in number – is in terms of power, they tend to become the representatives of the second group. This however implies the reintroduction of a process of representation, with the acceptance of the system in which it must take place, and the pursuit of *negotiable* ends.

It may happen that the process of absorption of new identities, and the consequent re-establishment of the normal working of the system of representation, is not completely successful. In such a case a chronic and non-institutionalised fragmentation of industrial action and conflict sets in. The power of small groups of organised workers is strengthened, but the nature of this power is such that it prevents the convergence of action on unitary goals or a unitary strategy. We may call it 'small scope' power, since it is oriented more towards conquering 'autonomy from' the system than 'power over' it. At the same time the mechanisms of mediation will have a very weak effect. Indeed, moderation of present demands as a function of the pursuance of future objectives makes much less sense, since the possibility of controlling the future course of events is low when the unit of action is small. Moreover, the representatives have much less leeway in interpreting the objectives of the rank and file, being more closely controlled by them.

## UNDERLYING TRENDS IN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS SYSTEMS

Our aim so far has been to show how equilibrium and disequilibrium mechanisms operate in a system of industrial relations where both collective bargaining and political exchange are relevant. As a result of these mechanisms the frequency of industrial conflicts seems to take the form of waves, showing phases of explosion and phases of reabsorption. But waves are not all alike, even if they show some similarity in the organisational behaviour of unions and in the intensity and forms of conflict. Types of demand, class alignments, the categories of workers involved and institutional changes are influenced by pre-existing trends. A brief examination of the relevant trends common to the industrial countries during the period preceding the wave which started in 1968–9 indicates how they generated the specific content of that wave.

Towards the end of 1967, one of the leading European experts in industrial relations, J. D. Reynaud, delineated the main trends in European industrial relations. They may be roughly summarised as follows:

- (a) At the enterprise level plant bargaining was expanding in scope and depth. Grievance procedures were increasingly being settled by negotiations. The unions were therefore expanding their influence in the enterprise and their presence at the plant level.
- (b) Demands for automatism in promotion, seniority, stable career patterns and the like revealed a shift of focus from the job to the working life.

(c) Unionisation was expanding into new occupational categories (white-collar, public and other tertiary services).

(d) The trend towards decentralisation was accompanied by a seemingly opposite trend towards a strengthening of the central confederations, which acquired new functions due to their relationships with governments and other political actors (i.e. to their political market activity).

What is noteworthy in such a list is, first, that it would still be valid today; second that not even an indirect allusion is to be found to a possible explosion of the kind which took place a few months later in Reynaud's own country, and the waves of conflict which ensued. It is a good reminder that long-term trends outlive cycles. But we must also observe that many of the characteristics which have been attributed to the wave of conflicts after 1968 were simply characteristics of the long-term trend, only in an acute form.

How are we to explain these trends? To what structural changes are they related? Reynaud mentions, without analysing it, a shift of power towards labour, and it would not be difficult to list a series of phenomena which substantiate such an affirmation. Some of them pertain to the subjects advancing the claims, like the expansion of education and the often mentioned phenomenon of rising expectations, with the consequent gap between expectations and achievements. They affect the intensity of claims as well as the capacity for organisation of the working class. Others are structural factors, like changes in the content of work (jobs whose performance is not easy to measure expand, putting a strain on control over the work-force), or increasing organisational interdependency (enhancing the power of small groups of workers, previously alluded to as 'labour's indirect power').

A more precise correspondence between changes in the relations of production and changes in 'representational identities' may be found by looking at two structural processes of a different kind. They are better able to explain shifts in power between various components of the working class and changes in the function of the representation of labour.

One is the process of stabilisation of a dual labour market. It consists in the incorporation of labour in one sector and in the lowering of security and in fluctuations of individuals (sudden inclusions and exclusions) in the other. This favours the decentralisation of bargaining and at the same time makes the existing system of labour representation vulnerable to the 'irruption' of new collective identities.

The other is the growing interdependence between intra- and extra-factory organisation of production. Since housing, welfare, transport, education and the health system affect both social life and the organisation and conditions of work, the scope of demands which pass through the representation of labour is widening. Unions tend to replace political parties in some of their traditional functions. Other factors further this primacy of union representation over the parties. Unions are more efficient in channelling demands because they express, or may mobilise, a participation stemming from the 'naturally collective' condition of working life. Moreover, interests are here more easily defined and the successes and failures of collective action

in advancing them are immediately verifiable. Such a superior efficiency becomes particularly evident in critical periods, when the traditional channels cease to appear trustworthy. Unions may then be called on to negotiate the whole economic policy of a country.

A consequence of all this is a tendency towards an overloading of the union. Because of the very relevance it has acquired and the functions it is called upon to perform it becomes organisationally rigid and fearful of new entries. Potential collective identities are opposed and warded off for a time, but they are likely to explode at another point.

The other main partner in the political exchange, the state, is also increasingly overloaded. The gap is widening between what is expected from the state and what the state is able to give; on the one hand because of the power of the groups, on the other because of the growing impact of international economic forces. As Lindbeck (1975: 36) puts it:

Thus at the same time as national governments have raised their ambitions to direct the details of the domestic economies, international forces have made both many targets and several policy instruments less susceptible to domestic national manipulation than earlier. Many new problems can be fruitfully seen in the perspective of these increased domestic policy ambitions in combination with the weakening of the power of the national state relative to the ever stronger international forces. 'People' demand more and more of the national state, at the same time as the national state is losing much of its autonomy because of the internationalisation process.

During the 1960s these phenomena were becoming more acute. Wage drift provoked a diffusion of plant bargaining and a general decentralisation of union structure. Migrations prepared the ground for the formation of new collective identities. The circumstance of full employment was holding in check for a period the most acute consequences of the structural dual labour market, without suppressing its premises. When the overheating of the economy required strong deflationary measures the choice was between a 'dictated' and a negotiated policy. Governments attempted different alternatives at different moments, but in general they began with *Diktat* and ended with negotiation and a clear return to the political market. As Soskice has shown elsewhere in this volume (p. 241), the type of deflationary policy which was adopted towards the mid-1960s generated the subsequent wage explosion. Through the analyses carried out in the various papers of our two volumes, it is possible to see how the differences in the form and content of conflicts and in the policy of unions and governments are a function of the degree of control of new entries to the political market and of the degree of dispersion of power within the system of the representation of labour.

## NOTE

1. In the course of this article we shall use terminology similar to that of the 'market theories of democracy' as MacPherson (1973; 185-95) calls them. But none of the main and well-founded criticisms that MacPherson addresses to those theories hold for the scheme we propose here. No 'inevitable equilibrium' is implied; on the contrary, we state that the factors that can account for destabilisation are external to the system and only partially controllable by it. No situation of 'free competition among well-informed individuals' is assumed; on the contrary, social conflict is assumed to be between groups or classes and between organisations. And with the analysis of the processes of formation of collective identities we think we give an example of what should be added to a general 'mere exchange' theory of the political system.

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<i>Brit. Jnl. of Ind. Rels.</i>	<i>British Journal of Industrial Relations</i>
<i>Econ. and Soc.</i>	<i>Economy and Society</i>
<i>Ind. and Lab. Rels. Rev.</i>	<i>Industrial and Labour Relations Review</i>
<i>Ind. Rels.</i>	<i>Industrial Relations</i>
<i>Int. Lab. Rev.</i>	<i>International Labour Review</i>
<i>Jnl. Pol. Econ.</i>	<i>Journal of Political Economy</i>
<i>Quad. di Rass. Sind.</i>	<i>Quaderni di Rassegna Sindacale</i>
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# Subject Index

Letters in brackets refer to the names of the six countries: B=Belgium, F=France, I=Italy, NL=Netherlands, UK=United Kingdom, WG=West Germany. In addition, US=United States of America.

Institutions included in the List of Abbreviations on pp xv-xviii are listed here in their abbreviated form.

References to disputes, workers, etc. within a particular industry are included in the general reference to that industry.

- absenteeism, 9, 12, 46
- accidents, 46, 94
- accords de productivité*, 212
- action, direct, 1, 11-14, 31, 254-7, 268
- AEU (UK), 124, 126n
- AFL-CIO (US), 189
- Agache Willot, 93
- Agence Scherbequaise d'Information (B), 256
- agreements, collective, contracts, 23, 212, 241-3; *see also* bargaining
  - long-term, 245
  - national, 212, 213
- agriculture, 38-41, 45, 72, 73, 80
- airline pilots, 15
- alienation, 53, 61, 66, 84
- Alsace (F), 93
- America; Latin, 198
  - North, 72, 166, 193, 221, 222
  - United States, American, 57, 69n, 103, 104, 115, 124, 138, 139, 200, 221-36 *passim*, 245, 287, 292
- Ampex, 10
- Amsterdam (NL), 249-51, 256, 261, 263
- anarcho-syndicalism, 11, 192
- Anti-Socialist Law (Germany), 131, 135
- Arabs, 93, 96
- ARAU (B), 254, 264
- architects, 252, 254, 261
- armed forces, 41
- Asians, 40
- ASLEF (UK), 112, 116
- aspirations, *see* expectations
- assemblées ouvrières*, 5
- assemblies of workers, 7, 165, 168; *see also supra*
- ASTMS (UK), 63, 107
- ASW (UK), 112
- AUBTW (UK), 112
- AUEW (UK), 24, 63, 105, 108, 111, 112, 118-22, 126n
  - district committees of, 120, 126n
  - Executive Committee, 119
  - National Committee 119, 122
  - Rules Revision Committee 108, 119
- authorities, local, 64, 249, 252, 253, 261, 263, 268-72; *see also* government, local
  - public, 15, 21, 28, 44, 254, 256; *see also* public sector
- authority, 60, 273
- autogestion*, 28, 32, 185, 192
- automation, 51, 52, 56, 69n, 75-7, 98
- automobile industry, *see* motor industry
- autoriduzione*, 252, 262, 265, 271
- Avanguardia Operaia* (I), 265, 270, 271, 275n
- Baden-Württemberg (WG), 74
- balance of payments, 17, 106, 224, 228, 229, 233-6, 239
- banking, banks, 41, 77, 94
  - staff associations, 45
- Bank of Italy, 236
- Banque Nationale (B), 28
- bargaining, negotiations, 46, 50, 55, 94, 102, 106, 115-17, 122, 123, 180, 196n, 199-206, 213-18, 238, 277-80, 284-7, 295; *see also* agreements
- articulated, 141-4, 150
- levels, 21-31 *passim*, 89, 115-17, 130-3, 178, 206, 211
  - company, enterprise, 115, 211, 292, 295
  - industry, 22-6
  - interprofessionnel*; inter-industry national 23-6, 211
  - national, 115, 152
  - plant, shop, 23-31, 115, 157, 167, 178, 244, 297

- regional, 23, 123, 132
- policies, 127-60 *passim*
- shop-floor related, 136-8, 150
- Bavaria (WG), 74, 133
- Beamter*, 43
- Belgium, 1, 4-12, 15-19, 22, 23, 27, 30, 32, 33n, 38, 41-3, 47, 50, 53, 55, 72, 73, 79, 85, 88-91, 95, 97, 179, 191, 192, 203, 207, 211, 213, 218, 219
- Betriebsräte*, 134, 135, 164-72, 188, 190, 202, 214, 241
- Betr. VG (WG), 134-6, 144, 214
- Billancourt (F), 87, 90
- bipartitism, 200, 203, 213
- BOAC (UK), 15
- Board of Mediators (NL), 200
- Bochum (WG), 170-3
- Bologna (I), 149
- Bonapartism, 39
- Bordeaux (F), 79
- boycotts, secondary, 10
- Brazil, 163
- BRB (UK), 116
- Bremen (WG), 136
- Bridlington Agreement (UK), 118
- Britain, Great, *see* United Kingdom
- Britanny (F), 79, 99n
- British Airline Pilots Association (UK), 107
- broadcasting, 29
- Brussels (B), 249-58, 261-4
- Bundesbank (WG), 237
- Bundestag (WG), 125
- bureaucracy, bureaucratisation, 43-6, 58, 60, 104, 108, 109, 114, 117, 180, 189
- bus-workers, 94, 120
- building industry, *see* construction industry
- Cables de Lyon, 99
- cadres*, 36, 62
- Caen (F), 79
- Canada, 221, 287
- Candy (I), 148
- capital, 36, 41, 42, 77, 79, 81, 84, 130, 133, 153, 197, 215-19, 263
- capitalism, capitalist, 35, 36, 39-42, 45, 48, 53-6, 62-6, 69n, 75, 82-5, 102-6, 128, 129, 133, 154, 158, 161, 173, 175, 179, 180, 188, 197-201, 215, 222, 234, 247, 248, 255-7, 260, 263, 266-73, 280, 287, 288
- car industry, *see* motor industry
- carburettor industry, 163
- catering industry, 45
- Catholics, Roman, 143, 187, 189, 191, 198, 205
- CDU-CSU (WG), 23; *see also* Christian Demo-  
cratic Parties
- Centre Point (UK), 256, 274n
- centro-sinistra*, centre-left, 196n, 292
- CFDT (F), 26, 32, 89, 90, 95, 96, 175, 179, 189, 192, 243, 246, 264
- CFTC (F), 26, 191
- CGIL (I), 25, 30, 56, 131, 134, 138-43, 147, 149, 154, 175, 191, 192, 238, 242, 246
- CGT (F), 26, 32, 56, 90, 96, 131, 175, 179, 183, 188, 189, 192, 243, 246, 264
- Chancellor, Federal (WG), 169
- Chantiers de France, 9
- chemical industry, 9, 80, 110, 115
- child labour, 83
- Christian(s), 179, 189, 264
- Democratic Parties; (B), 267
- (I) 130, 138, 205, 210; *see also* DC
- (WG) 107, 179, 191, 213; *see also*  
CDU-CSU
- Social Parties; (B), 23
- (F), 26
- CISL (I), 25, 138-43, 154, 175, 189-92, 242, 246
- civil service, servants, 44, 116
- society, 61, 197, 219
- claimants' unions, 264
- class(es), 15, 53, 49, 60, 65, 66, 159n, 182, 197-201, 206, 248, 251-3, 259, 295, 298n
- capitalist, 62
- dominant, 250, 263, 266
- middle, 60, 187, 190, 248, 267
- ruling, 29, 32, 52
- working, 19, 32, 35-7, 40, 48-59 *passim*, 65, 67, 84, 88-90, 129, 130, 138-41, 158, 174, 177-80, 187-95, 196n, 200-3, 232, 243, 247-53, 257-9, 262-4, 267-74, 275n, 281
- 'new', 36, 59, 61, 63, 76, 177, 187, 188
- class conflict, struggle, 22, 26, 32, 93, 94, 146, 160n, 177, 188, 253, 285, 291
- clerks, *see* workers, clerical
- Clichy (F), 99n
- closed shop, 118, 126n
- closures, shutdowns, 12, 47, 48, 53, 69n, 245, 264
- CNL (F), 239, 264, 268, 274n
- CNPF (F), 26, 212
- coal-mining, miners, 8, 10, 15, 18, 23, 32, 42, 44, 47-9, 106, 107, 125, 178, 183, 190, 207, 209, 219, 244
- co-determination, 125, 134; *see also* *Mitbestimmung*
- Co-Determination Law (WG), 135
- Coframille, 93
- Cold War, 191

- collectivism, 35-70 *passim*, 197, 202, 204, 277-98 *passim*
- Cologne (WG), 88, 145, 166, 173, 174
- co-management, 32
- comités d'entreprise*, 26, 30, 211
- de grève*, 5
- commerce, trade, 18, 73, 237
- commissions interne*, internal commissions, 133, 134, 144
- Common Market, *see* EEC
- Commonwealth, British, 39, 74, 78
- Communists, Communist Parties, 111, 122, 175-7, 180, 184-92, 196n, 199, 200, 205, 218, 219
- (B), 267
- (F), 187, 190-4, 268, 274, 274n; *see also* PCF
- (I), 130, 133, 191, 238, 269, 270, 274n; *see also* PCI
- (UK), 124, 191, 267
- (WG), 131; *see also* DKP and KPD
- communities, 48, 49, 92, 120
- comparisons, 43, 44, 114, 116
- compromesso storico*, 186, 188, 193, 196n, 210, 218
- concentration of industry, 133, 239
- concerted action, 112, 113; *see also* *konzertierte Aktion*
- conciliation, 23, 25, 204
- Confederation of Ship-building and Engineering Unions (UK), 115
- Conférence de Revenus* (F), 26, 207
- Confindustria (I), 210
- consciousness, 48, 53, 66, 67, 130, 266, 267
- consensus, 198, 199, 215, 216, 220n, 279, 280, 284, 292
- Conservatives, 190, 197
- Party (UK), 8, 29-31, 44, 111, 204, 205, 208, 249
- Consiglio Nazionale dell'Economia e del Lavoro (I), 205
- Constitution (F), 212
- (I), 205
- (NL), 200
- construction industry, building industry, 3, 10, 50, 64, 78, 89, 112, 249
- contrats de progrès*, 22
- corporatism, corporate state, 62, 131, 134, 139, 142, 152, 180, 195n, 196n, 197-210 *passim*, 213-6, 219, 248
- correnti*, 130, 149
- Coventry (UK), 114
- CSC (B), 23, 90, 95
- CUB (I), 7, 147-9, 265, 275n
- culture, cultural system, 40, 273
- Dagenham (UK), 91
- Dapperbuurst (NL), 261, 263, 267
- DATA (UK), 63
- DC (I), 196n, 210; *see also* Christian Democratic Parties
- deconfessionalisation, 179, 187-91; *see also* secularisation
- deflation, 233, 236, 239, 297
- delegati*, 7, 13, 28, 30, 90, 130, 133, 146-59 *passim*, 159n, 160n
- délégués du personnel*, plant stewards, 26
- demands, 3, 27, 36, 53, 54, 85-92, 139, 140, 145, 152, 153, 182-7, 192, 208-17, 247-56, 295, 296
- control (of jobs, production, work organisation), 62, 85, 86, 139, 185
- economic policy, 186
- education, 92, 185
- employment protection, job security, 3, 12, 153, 185
- hierarchy, grading, 86-8, 152, 164
- holidays, 91, 172
- housing, living conditions, 92, 185, 247-51, 255, 256
- investment 153
- 'new', 54, 55, 62, 161-76 *passim*
- pay, wages, 53, 62, 140, 153, 167, 168
- cost-of-living bonus, 3, 167, 171, 172
- egalitarian, levelling, 53, 54, 89, 150, 152, 161, 192, 214
- equal, for women, 86, 90, 91
- flat-rate, 152
- minimum, 3
- systems, 86
- piecework, abolition of, 85, 86
- political, 153, 183, 186, 212, 214
- qualitative, 36, 85, 140, 243
- quantitative, 140, 243
- retirement, age of, 3
- self-management, 36
- social reforms, welfare, 3, 186, 210, 214-17
- trade-union rights, 140, 185
- transport policy, 247-51
- urban amenities, 247-56
- working conditions, environment, 27, 54, 86, 87
- hours, 139, 140, 172
- rates, speeds, 85, 86, 139, 161, 167, 168
- democracy; bourgeois, 158
- industrial, 22
- trade unions, in, 103, 124, 284
- demonstrations, 9, 183, 254, 255, 264, 286
- devaluation, 224, 239
- developers, property, 254, 274
- Devlin Report, 109
- DGB (WG), 23, 24, 42, 107, 121, 124-7, 132, 136, 175, 188

- differentials, 55, 233, 236, 239-45, 282, 288  
 disarmament, nuclear, 109  
 dismissals, sackings, 29, 92, 168, 170  
 distributive trades, 41, 45; *see also* shops  
 DKP (WG), 191; *see also* Communists  
 docks, 3, 7, 9, 15, 47-9, 109, 116  
 dollar (US), 224  
 'Dolle Mina' (NL), 97  
 domination, 60, 199, 201  
 Donovan Commission, *see* Royal Commission  
     on Trade Unions  
 Dortmund (WG), 106  
 draughtsmen, 63, 70n  
 Dunkirk (F), 9, 92  
 Dunlop, 15  
 Düsseldorf Programme (WG), 24  
 dustmen, 244  
  
 Eastbourne (UK), 111  
 Economic Development Committees (UK),  
     112  
 economy, 17, 62, 132, 178-81, 193, 200-5,  
     210, 218, 219, 282, 286, 297  
 education, 36, 41, 61, 121, 248, 255, 296; *see*  
     also demands  
 EEC, 15, 46, 50, 111, 222, 235, 236, 250  
 elections, national, 6, 112, 188, 194, 195, 196n,  
     209, 219, 274, 286, 291, 292  
     union, 102, 103, 118-21  
     postal ballots in, 119  
 electrical power generating industry, 15  
 electro-mechanical industry, 80  
 electronics industry, 47, 77-9, 86, 99n  
 Emergency Laws (WG), 109, 183  
 employers, 3, 14, 24, 28, 33n, 43, 47, 48, 53, 58,  
     61, 69n, 70n, 80, 102, 106, 109, 110,  
     115, 116, 133, 136, 140, 141, 182, 197,  
     200, 201, 204-6, 213, 221, 231,  
     235-46 *passim*, 278, 282-7  
     associations, organisations, 24, 115, 116,  
     145, 188, 203, 211, 286  
 employment, 30, 35, 41, 45, 53, 65, 67, 72-8,  
     85, 123, 136, 150, 200, 204, 208, 232,  
     235, 241, 242, 265, 281, 286, 292, 297  
 engineering industry, engineers, 3, 32, 37, 47,  
     52, 57, 61, 62, 80, 89, 106, 108, 114,  
     115, 123, 124; *see also* metal-working  
     industries  
 England (UK), 72, 82, 166, 192, 252, 260  
 entertainment industry, 41  
 ETU (UK), 120, 122  
 exchange, 277-96 *passim*  
 expectations, aspirations, 69n, 113, 114, 225,  
     230, 282-4, 287, 288, 296  
 exploitation, 66, 150, 154  
 Fabrique National d'Herstal, 88, 91  
 factory council movement, 149; *see also*  
     workers' council movement  
 fairness, 114, 282, 288  
 farmers, 79  
 fascism, 189, 198, 199, 205, 219, 235  
 Fawley (UK), 115  
 FDP (WG), 31  
 Fédération des Comités d'Usagers des Transports  
     (F), 268  
 FGTB (B), 23, 32, 90, 213, 267  
 Fiat, 86, 89, 92, 138, 139, 147, 151  
 fibres, artificial, 9, 76, 110  
     natural, 80; *see also* textile industry  
 Fifth Republic (F), 206, 212  
 FIM - Cisl(I), 143, 152, 186, 265  
 financial services, 41, 45, 250  
 FIOM - CGIL (I), 138, 143, 149, 154,  
     265  
 firemen, 244  
 First World War, 113, 286, 287  
 Flanders, Flemish (B), 18, 79, 85, 192, 203  
 Flins (F), 87  
 FO (F), 26, 95, 191, 206, 212  
 food industry, 80  
 Ford Motor Company, 15, 53, 86-92, 96, 117,  
     121, 145, 166-70, 173, 175  
     shop stewards committee (UK), 121  
 Fordism, 54  
 foreign workers, 165, 166, 170-4, 177, 187; *see*  
     also immigrant workers  
 foremen, 74, 166-72  
 France, French, 1-19 *passim*, 25-32, 33n,  
     36-46 *passim*, 53-7, 61, 62, 69n, 71-4,  
     79, 81, 85-92, 96, 97, 99n, 111, 130,  
     131, 153, 161-3, 175, 178, 179, 183,  
     187-94, 196, 200, 205, 206, 211-13,  
     216, 218, 222, 226-40 *passim*, 243-52,  
     255-9, 262-4, 268, 272-4, 274n,  
     291-4  
     France (ship), 13  
 Frankfurt (WG), 74, 252, 256  
 Friedenspflicht, *see* peace obligation  
  
 Gamist movement (F), 269, 275n  
 GATT, 236  
 Gauche Prolétarienne (F), 275  
 Gaullism, 207  
 General Motors, 170  
 Germany, 198, 200  
     West, 1-12 *passim*, 15, 16, 19, 23, 27, 30-2,  
     33n, 38, 39, 42-6, 50, 53-7, 73, 74,  
     78-80, 86-92, 96, 101-76 *passim*, 178,  
     179, 183, 184, 188-92, 195, 196n,  
     201-3, 206, 207, 213-19, 222, 236-46  
     *passim*, 248, 253, 256-60, 264, 268,  
     273, 274n, 292

- Glasgow (UK), 12  
 GMWU (UK), 108, 112, 113, 117, 118, 121  
 GOG (WG), 171  
 go-slows, 9, 10, 19, 29, 151  
 Government Social Survey (UK), 46  
 governments, 8, 15, 22-5, 42, 43, 48, 53, 66,  
   105, 106, 112, 113, 124, 176-83,  
   186-92, 195n, 199-218 *passim*,  
   221-3, 228-31, 235, 236-46 *passim*,  
   250, 251, 263, 265, 274, 278-80, 287,  
   292, 293, 296, 297; *see also* public  
     local 15, 43, 44; *see also* authorities, local  
 Grand Coalition; big coalition (WG), 23, 112,  
   213, 218  
 Greece, Greeks, 163, 170, 173  
 Grenelle, les accords de (F), 3, 28, 211, 244, 294  
 grèves bouchons, 9  
   perlées, 9  
   tournantes, 9, 29  
 GRIF (B), 88  
 growth, economic, 180, 205, 207, 283  
  
 Halewood (UK), 86  
 health services, 41, 44, 255, 286, 296  
 Herrschaftsverband, 60  
 Hessen (WG), 74  
 Hoesch, 106  
 holidays, 136, 168; *see also* demands  
 Holland (NL), 97, 256  
 hostels, accommodation, 92, 166, 252, 255-9,  
   268  
 'hot autumn' 1969 (I), 3, 10, 25, 27, 127, 129,  
   146, 150, 153, 243  
 hotels and restaurants, 41  
 housing, 166, 249-52, 255-62, 265, 268-72,  
   274n, 296; *see also* hostels and de-  
   mands  
  
 IACP (I), 270  
 ideology, 22-4, 28, 32, 41, 43, 45, 55, 58, 61,  
   64, 65, 70, 79, 97, 98, 104, 198, 199,  
   216, 257, 260, 266, 273  
 IG Bau (WG), 111  
 IG Bergbau (WG), 241  
 IG Chemie (WG), 137  
 IG Metall (WG), 103, 109, 112, 121, 123, 127,  
   132, 135-7, 145, 146, 156, 165-72,  
   244, 246  
 ILO, 72, 73n  
 immigrant workers, migrant workers, 18, 19,  
   39, 40, 71-99 *passim*, 158, 187, 242,  
   249-59 *passim*, 268, 289, 297; *see also*  
   foreign workers  
 incomes, *see* wages  
   policy, 3, 15, 22, 63, 112, 113, 123, 124, 177,  
   180, 181, 186, 188, 195n, 200-15  
     *passim*, 218, 222, 234, 239-45, 286  
 incorporation, 112, 113, 123-5  
 Indian Workers' Association (UK), 96  
 Industrial Relations Act 1971, Bill (UK), 3,  
   29, 63, 183, 186, 193, 208, 209  
   Bill 1969 (UK), 27  
 industrialisation, 18, 38-40, 65, 74, 78  
 industry, industrial, 38-42, 45-9, 61, 62,  
   78-81, 84  
   structure of, 15, 50, 65  
 inflation, 16, 17, 106, 114, 202, 205, 211, 213,  
   216, 221-38 *passim*, 241, 245, 265,  
   280-2, 291  
   Scandinavian theory of, 227, 229  
 Institut für Sozialforschung (WG), 144  
 institutionalisation, 1, 8, 21-33 *passim*, 40, 48,  
   88, 89, 134, 181, 195, 198, 216-19,  
   221, 254, 273, 295  
 instrumentalism, 47, 53, 61, 63, 67  
 insurance companies, 41, 77  
 interests, 104-7, 129, 156, 157, 175, 195n,  
   282-95 *passim*  
 internal commissions, *see* *commissions interne*  
 International Socialists (UK), 267  
 Intersind (I), 140  
 investment, 17, 106, 150, 201, 210, 229, 240;  
   *see also* demands  
 Ireland, Irish, 39, 72, 78, 82, 83  
   Northern, 111  
 IRIS (UK), 119  
 iron industry, *see* *under* steel and iron industries  
 'isolated mass', 48, 49  
 Italy, Italians, 1-19 *passim*, 25-32, 33n,  
   38-45, 50, 54-7, 72, 73, 77, 78-80,  
   85-92, 97, 127-62 *passim*, 166, 169,  
   170, 175, 178, 179, 183-94 *passim*,  
   196n, 198, 200, 205, 206, 209, 210, 218,  
   222, 226-39 *passim*, 242-52 *passim*,  
   255-9, 262, 265, 268-74, 274n, 289,  
   293  
   north 40, 78, 89, 128, 154, 242  
   south 18, 19, 39, 85, 128, 153, 252  
 ITU (US), 103  
  
 Japan, 163  
 job control, 12  
   enrichment, 69n  
   evaluation, 25, 69n, 136  
   hierarchy, 99n; *see also* demands  
   satisfaction, 46  
   security, 243, 244; *see also* demands  
 Jordaan (NL), 261, 263  
  
 Keynesianism, 224-9, 282  
*konzertierte Aktion*, 193, 213, 214, 218, 238; *see*  
   *also* concerted action

- Korean War, 232  
KDP (WG), 169
- Laboratoire de Sociologie de la Connaissance (F), 77, 86, 161, 175
- labour, market, *see* markets  
movement, 35, 36, 42, 48, 51, 58, 67, 182-8, 200, 212, 214, 243, 248, 253, 257, 263-5, 272, 273, 294  
turnover, 46  
labour-only sub-contracting, 64
- Labour Party (UK), 8, 15, 24-31, 34n, 109-12, 178-80, 186-91, 208, 209, 237-9
- laissez faire*, 197, 204, 208
- law, legal framework, 30, 34n, 43, 122, 127, 201, 202, 205-10, 214, 217, 262, 265, 275n; *see also* strikes, legislation  
courts of, 119, 202
- left-wing groups, extra-parliamentary opposition, 27, 28, 33n, 92, 111, 149, 165, 168, 187, 242, 253, 264-73, 275n
- Le Mans (F), 79
- Lille (F), 93
- Limbourg (B), 8, 15
- Lip, 9, 11, 13, 93, 191
- Liverpool (UK), 116
- lock-outs, 18, 127
- loi de 27 décembre 1968* (F), 211  
13 juillet 1971 (F), 211  
*sur les conventions collectives* (B), 218
- Lombardy (I), 78
- London (UK), 74, 120, 254, 262, 264n, 274n  
Port of, 116
- Lorraine (F), 78, 79
- Lotta Continua* (I), 257, 270, 271
- low-income groups; low-paid, 123, 188
- Lumpenproletariat*, 52, 98
- Lutte Ouvrière* (F), 268
- Lyons (F), 74, 79
- machine tools industry, 51
- machinists, 88
- mai rampant* (I), 247
- managements, managers, 9, 10, 14, 31, 32, 46, 48, 56, 59-63, 69n, 73, 90, 105, 113, 145, 164-72, 208, 212, 240, 250, 252, 269, 278, 279  
'scientific', 50
- 'Manhattan Plan' (B), 250, 256, 263
- Manifesto, II* (I), 192, 271
- manufacturing industry, 45, 50, 55
- Maoism, Maoists, 267, 268, 275n
- marches of workers, 9, 168-72
- marginal workers, 93, 103
- 'Marie Mineur' (B), 97
- markets, 198, 281, 285-8  
labour, 69n, 75, 83, 201, 207, 224, 225, 228, 233-6, 241-3, 246, 277-81, 286, 297  
political, 280-5, 294-7  
product, 110, 225, 228
- Marolles (B), 250, 253, 261, 263
- Marseilles (F), 96
- Marxism, Marxists, 41, 42, 58, 59, 82, 102
- Marzotto, 148
- Massif Central (F), 81
- May 1968 (F), 3, 10, 15, 28, 29, 36, 53, 62, 183, 191, 238, 243, 247, 260, 294
- mechanisation, 50-2, 76
- mediation, 23, 200, 205
- meetings of workers, 13, 30, 90
- Mercedes, 166
- mergers, 47, 239-42, 245
- Meriden (UK), 12
- metal (-working) industries, 80, 107, 132, 133, 140, 143, 191, 238, 244; *see also* engineering
- Mexico, 163
- migrants, *see* immigrant workers
- Milan (I), 92, 265, 275n
- Mineworkers Union (US), 103
- mining, *see* coal-mining
- Ministry of Labour (UK), 204, 209
- Mutbestimmung*, 22, 23, 31, 185, 202, 214; *see also* co-determination
- modernisation, 75
- Molenbeek (B), 250
- monetarists, 224-9, 282
- monetary policy, 236, 237, 280  
system, international, 223
- money supply, 228
- monopolies, 3, 8, 10, 69n, 236
- Moselle (F), 74
- motor industry, 9, 47, 53, 54, 76-9, 163-75  
*passim*, 240  
bike industry, 12
- MTA (F) 93, 96
- multi-nationals, 79, 201, 250
- Munich (WG), 74
- NALGO (UK), 64, 105
- Nantes (F), 79
- Naples (I), 131
- NAS (I), 142
- NASD (UK), 116
- National Assembly (F), 212  
Board for Prices and Incomes (UK), 24, 44  
Dock Labour Board (UK), 116  
Economic Development Council (UK), 24  
Maritime Union (US), 103  
Minority Movement (UK), 124  
Union of Teachers (UK), 105

- Workers Committee Movement (UK), 124  
 nationalisation, nationalised industries, 24,  
 42-4, 48, 112, 116  
 Nazis (WG) 201, 202  
 negotiations, *see* bargaining  
 'neighbour groups', 156  
 Netherlands, Dutch, 38, 41, 46, 50, 53, 55,  
 69n, 73, 179, 180, 191, 192, 200-3,  
 207, 215, 218, 248, 257-9, 263-6, 273,  
 274n  
 Neuss am Rhein (WG), 163  
 Newspaper Publishers' Association (UK), 116  
 NGA (UK), 121  
 Nieuwmarkt (NL), 251, 256, 263  
 North-Africans, 94  
 North Rhein Westphalia (WG), 145, 146  
*Nouvelle Société* (F), 22  
 NUBE (UK), 45  
 NUGMW (UK), 103, 106  
 NUM (UK), 48, 111, 112, 244  
 NUPE (UK), 118, 120, 126n  
 NUR (UK), 109, 112, 113, 116, 118  
 Nuremberg (WG), 137  
 nurses, 44, 181  
  
 occupational structure, 9, 10, 31, 35-70  
     *passim*, 67, 104, 179, 191, 289, 296  
 OECD, 4n, 6n, 16n, 80n, 236  
 office accommodation, 250, 251, 261, 263,  
 274n  
     workers, *see* workers, office  
 oil crisis, 1, 114, 173  
 oil-refining industry, 110; *see also* petroleum  
 oligarchy, 102, 120-5  
 Opel, 166, 170-2, 175  
*Ordnungsfaktor*, 181, 188, 202, 207, 208, 218  
*Orientierungsdaten* (WG), 213, 214  
 ÖTV (WG), 43, 44  
*ouvriers professionnels*, 33n  
     *spécialisés*, 19, 33n  
 overtime 167  
     bans on, 10, 12, 29  
 owner-occupiers, 274n  
  
 Painters Union (US), 103  
 Paris (F), 18, 74, 79, 99n, 249-52, 255, 262-4,  
 268-72, 274n  
 parliaments, 125, 178, 185, 186, 216, 219, 294;  
     *see also* Bundestag and National  
     Assembly  
 Parodi system (F), 69n, 99n  
 participation, 26, 94, 95, 113, 121, 133, 180,  
 188, 202, 210, 211, 218, 253, 254, 263,  
 272, 293-5; *see also* workers' partici-  
 pation  
 parties, political, 23, 43, 130, 177-96 *passim*,  
 203, 210, 212, 218, 219, 232, 253,  
 266-74, 281, 294, 296  
*patto sociale*, 210  
 pay, *see* wages  
 payments systems, 245; *see also* demands  
 PCF (F), 187, 196n, 243, 268, 273; *see also*  
     Communists  
 PCI (I), 134, 191, 196n, 243, 268, 273; *see also*  
     Communists  
 PDUP (I), 271  
 peace obligation, no-strike agreements,  
     *Friedenspflicht*, 23, 27, 31, 140, 143, 145,  
     202-7, 210, 211  
 peasants, 39  
 Péchinery-Noguères, 9  
 pensions, 286  
 petroleum industry, 76; *see also* oil-refining  
 pickets, picketing, 91  
     'flying', 9  
 piecework, 25, 136, 151; *see also* demands  
 Piedmont (I), 78  
 Pierburg Autobaugerate KG, 163-6, 173, 174  
 Pilkingtons, 15  
 Pirelli, 86, 92, 147, 148, 151  
 planning, economic, 32, 180, 188, 189, 201,  
     204, 206, 208, 213-16  
     urban, 92, 252, 257, 263, 266  
 plastics industry, 76  
 pluralism, 201  
 POEU (UK), 121  
 police, 165, 166, 169, 172, 256, 257  
 politicisation, 151, 158, 164, 181-3, 193, 196n  
 politics, 63, 111-13, 175-220 *passim*, 247,  
 248, 257-60, 263-74 *passim*, 277-98  
     *passim*; *see also* demands  
     internal, of unions 101-26 *passim*  
 pollution, 84  
 Porto Marghera (I), 152  
 Portugal, Portuguese, 81, 198  
 postal services, 42, 109, 116  
 post-industrial society, 38, 41, 47, 48  
*Potere Operato* (I), 257  
 pound, *see* sterling  
 power, 10, 34, 217, 279, 280, 284, 285, 288,  
     289, 292, 294  
 power industry, *see* electrical power generating  
 press, the, 169  
 prices, 226-9, 233-8, 241, 265, 280, 289  
 printing industry, 80, 111, 118, 120  
 private sector, 42-5, 59, 69n, 181, 239, 244,  
     245  
 production, 17, 59, 61, 76, 85  
     continuous-flow, 76  
     integrated processes of, 18, 20  
     means of, 84  
     relations of, 66

- productivity, 59, 62, 81, 109, 150, 151, 173,  
202, 208, 225-7, 240, 245, 246n  
agreements, bargaining, 12, 22, 27, 115,  
116, 126n, 208  
professions, 41, 45  
profit, 15, 17, 208, 222, 223, 233-41, 245  
-sharing schemes, 26, 207  
*programmation sociale* (B), 22, 23, 203, 213  
*Programme Commun* (F), 32, 188, 193, 196n,  
212, 218, 268, 274  
proletarianisation, 70n, 73  
proletariat, 35, 36, 49, 77, 85, 274  
promotion, 58, 73  
Provo movement (NL), 273  
PSIUP (I), 149, 153; *see also* socialism  
PSU (F), 268, 275n; *see also* socialism  
public administration, 41, 42  
authorities, *see* authorities, public  
expenditure, spending, 223, 229, 239, 280,  
291  
sector, services, 3, 7, 8, 15, 21, 41-5, 59, 63,  
69n, 178, 181, 187, 205-7, 212, 221,  
237-9, 242, 286, 296; *see also* auth-  
orities, public  
charges, 251, 255-8, 262, 265, 271  
utilities, 44  
racialism, 92, 96  
railways, 10, 42, 47, 48, 109, 116  
metropolitan (NL), 250, 263  
rank-and-file, 7, 8, 11, 14, 17-20, 23, 26, 27,  
30, 63, 102-7, 110-22 *passim*, 128,  
146, 147, 154, 158, 159, 177-82, 185,  
186, 190, 191, 195, 202, 214, 244, 285,  
292-5; *see also* trade unions, member-  
ship  
rationalisation of industry, 1, 15-18, 44-6,  
54, 61, 69n, 163, 181, 222, 232, 233,  
236, 239-45  
recession, 26, 33n, 67, 79, 80, 128, 143,  
210-13, 216, 217, 234-42  
reconstruction, post-war, 78, 180, 199, 200,  
203, 207  
redevelopment, urban renewal, 249, 250, 253,  
255, 258-64, 268  
redundancy, lay-offs, 13, 17, 18, 47, 53, 65,  
69n, 265  
regionalism, 179, 192, 196n  
religion, 179  
Renault, 9, 15, 18, 87-9  
Rennes (F), 79  
rents, 252, 256, 262, 269, 270, 274n  
strikes over, 174, 249, 254-8  
repression, 16, 18, 29, 31, 122, 133, 256, 257,  
266  
Republican Party (I), 138  
Resistance, the, 189, 199, 203  
retirement, 78, 211  
Rhodiaceta, 9  
Rhône-Alps (F), 74  
Rome (I), 270  
Royal Commission on the Distribution of  
Wealth (UK), 114  
on Trade Unions and Employers Associ-  
ations, Donovan Commission (UK),  
24, 105, 126  
Ruhr (WG), 74, 170  
Ruskin College Trade Union Research Unit  
(UK), 117  
Russelsheim (WG), 170, 171  
sabotage, 9  
*Sachverständigenrat* (WG), 202, 213  
sackings, *see* dismissals  
safety, 9, 14, 143  
*salto della scocca, il*, 151  
SAS (I), 141, 142  
Saviem, 9  
Schirmeck (F), 93  
schools, 248  
teachers, 44, 181, 244  
science, workers in, 41  
*Scottish Daily News*, 12  
SDS (WG), 273  
Second World War, 78, 113, 123, 130, 135,  
192, 200, 207, 286  
*Secours Rouge* (F), 257, 268  
secularisation, 198; *see also* deconfessional-  
isation  
sequestration, 8, 9, 29, 31, 91  
services sector, 18, 39-47, 73, 187; *see also*  
tertiary sector and public services  
Settimo (I), 86  
ship-building, 47, 48  
shipping industry, 13  
shops, shop-keepers, department stores, 57,  
69n, 77, 94, 261; *see also* distributive  
trades  
shop-stewards, 7, 24, 25, 46, 52, 56, 105,  
113-18, 121, 124, 126n, 130, 135,  
144-6, 156, 188, 190, 205, 240  
committees of, 121, 124, 146, 156  
movement, 124  
shutdowns, *see* closures  
Sikhs, 94  
'sit-ins', 8-10, 29, 91, 93, 99n  
skill, skill levels, 49, 51, 54, 55, 69n, 73-9, 83,  
86-90, 98, 192, 203  
SNCF (F), 15  
Sociaal Economisch Raad (NL), 215  
social compact, social contract, 22, 31, 112,  
113, 123, 178, 186, 193, 286

- market, 201
- reforms, 193, 204; *see also* demands
- security payments, 239, 286
- workers, 252
- Social Democratic Parties, 101, 102, 177-80, 189-92, 218, 263
  - (I), 138
  - (NL), 263, 266, 267
  - (UK), 187, 188
  - (WG), 4, 131, 175, 176, 179, 190; *see also* SPD
- Socialism, Socialists (Parties), 32, 107, 176, 184-9, 191, 197-200
  - (B), 23
  - (F), 275n, *see also* PSU
  - (I), 130, 134; *see also* PSIUP
- Southall (UK), 96
- soziale Symmetrie*, 214, 238
- Spain, Spaniards, 170, 198
- SPD (WG), 23, 24, 30, 109, 112, 122, 125, 171-4, 238; *see also* Social Democratic Parties
- speculation, property, 251, 256
- squatters, 249, 252-62 *passim*, 275n
- SSA (I), 141, 142
- state, the, 15, 41, 42, 45, 63, 66, 67, 69n, 103, 178-82, 185-9, 193, 197-220 *passim*, 247, 251, 256, 257, 263, 266-74, 285-7, 297
- status, 55, 58, 60, 83, 104, 248
- Statuto dei Lavoratori* (I), 7, 210
- Stecke Arm (NL), 267
- steel and iron industries, 23, 42, 47, 49, 76, 78, 106, 107, 124, 125
- Steelworkers Union (US), 103
- sterling (UK), 209
- stratification, social, 58
- strikes, 1-34 *passim*, 43-6, 63, 85-91, 94, 125, 127, 132, 147, 151, 161-76 *passim*, 178, 183, 186-93, 202, 206-10, 217, 219, 221-46 *passim*, 278, 287, 291
  - ballots, referenda, 7, 29, 120, 132
  - committees, 90, 96, 147-50, 153, 169, 172
  - control over, 1, 5-8, 11
  - cycles of, 290-16
  - general, 265
  - industry-level, 3-7
  - legislation, 25, 29, 31, 66, 202-5, 208; *see also* law
  - length of, 1, 5
  - May 1968 (F), *see* May 1968
  - national industry-wide, 3-7
  - notices, 207
  - pay, funds, 131, 151
  - plant-level, workshop, 3-9, 14-20, 27, 244
  - political, 29
  - rent, *see under* rent
  - right to, 25-8, 127, 182, 195n, 202, 205, 206
  - September 1969 (WG), 10, 106, 146, 160n, 161, 214, 241
  - size of, 4, 5, 8
  - spontaneous, 'wildcat', 5, 24, 31, 33n, 238
  - statistics of, 2, 4, 6, 33n
  - types of, 8-14; *see also* grèves
    - a scacchiera*, 9
    - a singhiozzo*, 9
    - 'chessboard', 151
    - 'confetti', 151
  - unofficial, 4, 7-9, 15, 24, 33n, 34n, 106, 112, 116, 163-76 *passim*, 203, 204, 221, 222, 232, 233, 241-5
- students movement, 32, 243, 248, 252, 253, 258-60, 273, 294
- Stuttgart (WG), 74, 86
- subordination, 60, 113, 198, 199, 220n
- Sub-Aviation, 15
- SUNIA (I), 249, 269, 270, 274n
- supervisors, 62, 118
- supervisory boards, 124
- Switzerland, 92
- syndicalism, 139
- syndicalisme gestionnaire*, 56, 62, 70n
- tariffs, 235, 236
- TASS (UK), 63
- taxation, 44, 223, 239
- Taylorism, 54, 76
- teachers, *see* schools
- Teamsters Union (US), 103
- technicians, *see* workers, technical
- technocracy, 62
- technology, 50-4, 61, 62, 69n, 76, 150
- telephonists, 109, 116
- tenants, 249, 274n
  - associations, 249, 254, 256, 267, 268
- tertiary sector, 41, 73-7, 296; *see also* services sector
- textiles industry, 47-9, 72, 78, 86, 93, 110; *see also* fibres, natural
- TGWU (UK), 103, 105, 109, 113, 116, 118, 120, 123
  - Record*, 114
- Toutée procedure (F), 237
- trade, *see* commerce
- trade councils, 125
- trade unions, 5-8, 13, 14, 19-32, 35, 40, 43-53 *passim*, 56, 59-64, 69n, 70n, 77, 84, 87-90, 94-7, 101-60 *passim*, 161, 167, 175-97 *passim*, 200, 217-19, 221, 232, 233, 236-8, 241-6, 251, 254, 264, 268, 271, 275n, 277-86, 291-7
  - branches, 25, 30, 121, 267

- breakaway, 109
- craft, 24, 45
- district, 108
- elections, *see* elections
- leaders, officers, 21, 88, 101-26 *passim*, 136, 175, 178, 182-5, 188, 190, 200-4, 209, 210, 217, 218, 221, 241, 243, 288, 292, 295
- earnings of 104, 105
- membership, unionisation, 20, 21, 42-8, 58, 63, 89, 101-26 *passim*, 133, 143, 145, 155, 157, 158, 164, 167, 182, 193, 196n, 200-3, 208-12, 217, 218, 242, 277, 284, 285, 290, 296; *see also* rank-and-file
- plant-level, shop-floor organisation, 7, 8, 46, 54, 108, 120, 127-60 *passim*, 183-5, 203, 233, 265
- rights, 200, 210, 211; *see also* demands
- structure, 101-60 *passim*
- 'transmission-belt', 189
- unification of, unity, 143, 149, 153, 179, 191, 210
- white-collar, 24, 58-64, 105, 107
- work-place representatives, 11, 24, 30, 104, 121, 123, 182, 183; *see also* shop stewards
- work-shop sections, 138, 141-6, 150
- traffic, 251, 286
- training, 30, 36, 61
- transport, 32, 41, 42, 45, 251, 255, 258, 296; *see also* demands
  - fares, 251, 262-5, 268, 274n
- Treasury Agreement 1915 (UK), 124
- tripartism, tripartite, 4, 8, 22, 28, 30, 113, 204, 208-13, 216, 218
- Triumph, 12
- Trotskyists, 192, 267, 268
- TUC (UK), 8, 31, 63, 64, 96, 112, 121, 186, 188, 190, 208, 209
- General Council of, 112
- turbans, 94
- Turin (I), 86, 149, 153, 265, 271
- Turkey, Turks, 88, 91, 92, 163, 166-70, 173, 174
- UAW (US), 103, 139
- UIL (I), 138, 142, 191, 242
- UILM (I), 265
- ultima ratio*, 202
- under-developed countries, 84
- underemployment, 173
- unemployment, unemployed, 14-17, 53, 55, 65, 69n, 78-80, 84, 85, 113, 123, 131, 170, 173, 200, 205-9, 216-19, 222-39 *passim*, 244, 260, 264, 281
- benefit, 286
- UNIA (I), *see* SUNIA
- Unione Inquilini* (I), 265
- unionisation, *see* trade unions, membership
- United Kingdom, 1-12 *passim*, 15, 16, 20, 24-31, 33n, 34n, 38-46, 52, 55, 57, 61-5, 73, 74, 78, 91, 94, 96, 101-26 *passim*, 162, 175, 178-83, 186-94, 196n, 200, 203-9, 213, 217-19, 222, 226-40 *passim*, 243-6, 248, 249, 253-9, 262, 264, 267, 272, 273, 274n, 289, 292
- United States, *see* America
- Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, 12
- UPW (UK), 108, 116, 118
- urban conflicts, protests, 92, 247-75 *passim*
- urbanisation, 38-40, 65, 72
- USDAW (UK), 111, 113
- Usinor, 92
- Venice (I), 265
- Vertrauensleute*, -körper, 7, 107, 130, 135, 136, 145, 146, 155-9, 160n, 164, 167-72, 188, 190, 214, 241
- verzuling*, 191, 200
- Vietnam War, 222, 223, 232, 267
- violence, 20, 29, 31, 263, 270
- Volkswagen, 157, 166
- voluntarism, 193
- Vosges (F), 81
- 'wage explosion', 221-46 *passim*, 297
- wages, wage increases, earnings, pay, incomes, 15, 16, 47, 60, 64, 66, 83, 106, 109, 110, 125, 130, 132, 136-9, 166, 188, 195, 203, 204, 208, 227, 229, 234, 237-41, 246n, 265, 277, 282, 292; *see also* demands, pay
- drift, 144, 201, 205, 297
- minimum, 89, 211, 286
- restraint, 44, 178, 186, 204, 218, 222, 232, 236-8, 243
- Wallonia, Walloon (B), 79, 192, 203
- Weimar Republic, 135
- welfare state, 22, 103, 123, 200, 296
- West Indians, 40
- Whitley Council (UK), 116
- women, female workers, 18-20, 30, 45, 71-99 *passim*, 136, 158, 163-5, 174, 177, 187, 248, 294
- movements, feminism, 97
- Woolf's, 96
- work, organisation of, 17, 25, 296
- workers, employees; clerical, 57, 69n
- craft, 50-2
- manual, blue-collar, 26, 27, 49-64 *passim*,

- 82, 162, 187, 252  
 'marginal', 51, 71-99 *passim*  
 'mass', 55, 56, 173-6  
 new groups of 1, 18-20  
 non-manual, 35, 51, 57, 64  
 office, 84, 250; *see also* *cadres*  
 process, 56  
 production-line, assembly line, 50, 55, 81, 167  
 rural, 18, 39, 78  
 salaried, 1, 58  
 self-employed, 38, 57  
 semi-skilled, 50-6, 74, 87, 91, 173, 177, 242, 245; *see also* *ouvriers spécialisés*  
 skilled, 12, 33n, 50-2, 74-8, 84, 165, 166, 170, 171, 174, 187, 242, 245  
 staff, 58  
 technical, 33n, 56, 57, 61-3, 76, 77, 84, 242  
 unskilled, 19, 50-5, 71-5, 78-91 *passim*, 95, 99n, 163, 170, 173, 177, 187  
 white-collar, 10, 20, 32, 35-7, 56-64, 67, 69n, 77, 116, 162, 163, 169-72, 187, 221, 252, 269, 296  
 workers' control, 32, 36, 52; *see also* demands  
     council movement, 152-4; *see also* factory council movement  
     participation, 209, 217; *see also* participation  
 work-group, 18, 33, 105, 155-9  
 work-ins, 9, 67  
 work-rates, 12, 151, 245; *see also* demands  
 working conditions, 30, 39, 45, 53, 93, 136, 145, 166, 211, 240, 296; *see also* demands  
     hours, 13, 136, 286; *see also* demands  
     methods, 17  
 works councils, 23, 30, 31, 56, 108, 132-46  
     *passim*, 150, 159, 200, 201, 205, 241; *see also* *Betriebsrate*  
 work-to-rule, 10, 29  
 young people, workers, 18, 19, 30, 33n, 79, 83, 163, 177, 187, 252-5, 258-60, 268, 273, 294  
 Yugoslavia, 163, 167, 169, 173

# Name Index

- Aaron, B., 299, 305, 312, 314, 316  
 Abadun, L., 299  
 Accornero, A., 131, 133, 139, 141, 299  
 Adam, G., 46, 62, 299  
 Agartz, V., 184, 299  
 Aglieta, R., 33n, 299  
 Akkermans, T., 196n, 200, 215, 299  
 Albanese, L., 131, 299  
 Albers, D., 130, 131, 150, 183, 299, 300  
 Allen, V. L., 103, 300  
 Almond, G., 300  
 Alquati, R., 173, 300  
 Anderson, P., 316  
 Andrieux, A., 64, 300  
 Antoniazzi, S., 146, 300  
 Armstrong, E. G. A., 317  
 Asquith, R., 292  
 Bahrdt, H. P., 312  
 Bailey, R., 274n, 300  
 Bain, G. S., 43, 57-60, 63, 290, 300  
 Banks, J. A., 103, 278, 300  
 Barbash, J., 200, 201, 206, 215, 300  
 Barjonet, A., 183, 300  
 Barkin, S., 300, 301  
 Basnett, D., 118  
 Baudouin, T., 71-99 *passim*  
 Baxter, R., 83  
 Becalli, B., 246n  
 Bechhoffer, F., 306  
 Beck, W., 300  
 Beer, S. H., 219, 300  
 Bell, D., 35, 37, 42, 300, 301  
 Bellon, B., 76, 301  
 Benguigni, G., 316  
 Bercaff-Ferry, R., 92, 301  
 Berghau, 240  
 Bergmann, J., 33n, 132, 174, 180, 196n, 301  
 Bernstein, I., 301  
 Beynon, H., 53, 301  
 Bianchi, G., 240, 299, 301  
 Birchall, I., 183, 301  
 Bismarck, O. von, 135  
 Blackburn, R., 316  
 Blackburn, R. M., 58, 301  
 Blackmer, D. L. M., 238, 301  
 Blain, A. N. J., 107, 301  
 Blauner, R., 56, 69n, 301  
 Blum, L., 292  
 Bois, J., 183, 301  
 Bon, F., 299  
 Bowen, R. J., 274n, 301  
 Braec, 33n, 301  
 Brandt, W., 169, 178  
 Braverman, H., 69n, 301  
 Brenner, O., 103  
 Brooks, D. U., 40, 301  
 Brough, I., 114, 307  
 Brown, W. A., 114, 115, 301  
 Buffard, J. P., 310  
 Butler, D., 190, 196n, 302  
 Capdevielle, J., 299  
 Carchedi, G., 69n, 302  
 Cardillo, E., 274n, 302  
 Carron, Lord, 105  
 Castellina, L., 151, 302  
 Castells, M., 274n, 302  
 Castles, S., 74n, 75n, 82-4, 96, 302  
 Celik, H., 302  
 Cella, 143, 302  
 Censi, G., 151, 154, 158, 302  
 Charlot, M., 33n, 302  
 Cherki, E., 247-75 *passim*  
 Cialaloni, 175, 302  
 Clack, G., 316  
 Clark, C., 41, 302  
 Clegg, H. A., 106, 278, 288, 302  
 Cliff, T., 183, 301  
 Clinard, M. B., 274n, 302  
 Coates, D., 300  
 Coing, H., 92, 301  
 Coleman, U. S., 102  
 Collin, M., 71-99 *passim*  
 Cook, A. H., 121, 303  
 Cooke, W. F., 118, 304  
 Corden, W. M., 246n  
 Corina, J. G., 112, 303  
 Cornu, R., 33n, 303  
 Coser, L. A., 198, 303  
 Cousins, F., 105  
 Crouch, C. J., 29, 31, 112, 126n, 186, 197-220

- passim*, 246n, 303  
 Crozier, M., 69n, 303  
 Cunningham, 170  
  
 d'Agostini, F., 148, 159n, 303  
 Dahl, R. A., 303  
 Dahrendorf, R., 60, 181, 198, 219, 303  
 Daniel, W. W., 47, 303  
 Daolio, A., 274n, 303  
 Davis, E., 317  
 Deakin, A., 103  
 Debré, M., 237  
 Debunne, G., 90, 303  
 Delors, J., 97, 303  
 Delp, V., 166, 303  
 Deppe, R., 177-96 *passim*, 218, 303  
 Dickens, L., 316  
 Dillon, C., 236  
 Doeringer, P. B., 51, 304  
 Donovan, Lord, 24  
 Drago, A., 302  
 Dubin, R., 308  
 Dubois, P., 1-33 *passim*, 42, 44, 46, 55, 56, 62, 189, 191, 211, 304  
 Dulong, R., 304  
 Dumont, J. P., 304  
 Durand, C., 33n, 55, 56, 62, 70n  
 Durcan, J., 33n, 304  
 Durkheim, E., 197  
 Dussa, S., 313  
  
 Eckart, C., 114, 174, 304  
 Edelstein, J. D., 103, 118, 119, 304  
 Eliassen, K. A., 180, 304  
 Elliott, R. F., 240, 304  
 Ellis, N. D., 116  
 Ellis, V., 300  
 Elsheikh, F., 290, 300  
 Enderle, A., 131, 304  
 Engels, F., 39, 82, 304  
 Erbes-Seguin, S., 246n, 304  
  
 Fair, R., 305  
 Ferrario, L., 141, 305  
 Ferrarotti, F., 274n, 305  
 Fichter, T., 132, 314  
 Fisher, A., 118  
 Fisher, M. R., 305  
 Flanagan, R., 234, 238, 316  
 Flanders, A., 33n, 107, 114, 115, 278, 286, 305  
 Flemming, J., 305  
 Floud, J., 246n  
 Foa, V., 139, 140  
 Foote, N. N., 40, 305  
 Fox, A., 33n, 114, 220n, 305  
 Freyssenet, M., 77, 305  
  
 Gaitskell, H., 109  
 Gajdos, C., 316  
 Gani, L., 95, 305  
 Garaudy, R., 36, 305  
 Garavini, S., 139, 140, 153, 156, 305  
 Gaulle, C. de, 183, 196n, 237  
 Geiselberger, S., 173, 305  
 Gennard, J., 313  
 Gerlach, F., 314  
 Giddens, A., 59, 60, 305  
 Ginsberg, M., 308  
 Giugni, G., 202, 205, 206, 238, 305  
 Glyn, A., 234, 235, 240, 246n, 306  
 Godard, F., 250, 306  
 Goldey, D., 238, 243, 246n, 306  
 Goldschmidt, W., 300  
 Goldthorpe, J. H., 47, 53, 61-4, 306  
 Goodman, J. F. B., 317  
 Goodrich, C. L., 52, 306  
 Gordon, R., 281, 289, 291, 306  
 Gramsci, A., 37, 39, 54, 306  
 Granotier, B., 306  
 Grootings, P., 200, 215  
 Grossmann, H., 274n, 306  
 Gschlossl, A., 314  
 Guilbert, M., 95, 306  
 Guillermin, D., 71-99 *passim*  
  
 Hamilton, R. F., 39, 306  
 Hansen, A., 290, 306  
 Harris, N., 198, 306  
 Hartmann, P. T., 313  
 Hatt, P. K., 40, 305  
 Hemingway, J., 109, 306  
 Hepple, B., 204, 308  
 Herding, R., 103, 117, 177-96 *passim*, 303, 304, 306, 307  
 Herrmann, U., 152, 307  
 Hicks, J. R., 282, 283, 288, 307  
 Hill, S., 307  
 Hinton, J., 52, 124, 307  
 Holt, C., 307  
 Hoss, D., 177-96 *passim*, 202  
 Huet, A., 274n, 307  
 Huster, E. U., 132, 307  
 Hyman, R., 33n, 35-69 *passim*, 102, 114, 306, 307  
  
 Ingham, G. K., 46, 307  
  
 Jackson, D., 44, 308  
 Jackson, T., 118  
 Jacobi, O., 128, 180, 196n, 301, 303, 308, 310, 314, 317  
 Jaerisch, U., 304  
 Japp, K., 304

- Jenkins, C., 118  
 Jenkins, P., 308  
 Johnson, C., 111, 308  
 Johnson, H. G., 223, 232, 308  
 Johnson, L. B., 223  
 Johnson, T. J., 45, 308  
 Jones, J., 118  
 Junes, E. A., 312
- Kahn-Freund, O., 204, 308, 309  
 Kaldor, N., 288, 308  
 Kalecki, J., 291, 292  
 Kassalow, E. M., 308  
 Kavanagh, D., 196n, 302  
 Kennedy, J., 236  
 Kerckhove, J. van de, 33n, 308  
 Kern, H., 50, 51, 56, 65, 67, 173, 174, 308  
 Kerr, C., 48, 49, 308  
 Kesting, H., 312  
 Keynes, Lord, 227, 282, 283  
 Kindleberger, C. P., 234, 308  
 Kirchlechner, B., 161-76 *passim*, 304  
 Koppel, H., 191, 308  
 Korber, K., 44, 308  
 Kornhauser, A., 308  
 Kornhauser, W., 308  
 Kossack, G., 74n, 75n, 82, 84, 96, 302  
 Kramer, D., 274n, 316
- Labini, S., 238  
 Lagasse, A., 203, 309  
 Laidler, D., 283, 309  
 Lama, L., 30, 134, 191, 309  
 Lancaster, K., 287, 309  
 Lane, T., 66, 309  
 Leggett, J. C., 39, 309  
 Lerner, S. W., 109, 309  
 Lettier, 140  
 Lewis, 103  
 Lignon, J., 64, 300  
 Lindbeck, A., 297, 309  
 Lipset, S. M., 102, 120, 309  
 Liuzzi, F., 299  
 Lloyd, J., 316  
 Lockwood, D., 58, 61, 64, 66, 306, 309  
 Lorwin, V. R., 196n, 203, 309  
 Loveridge, R., 116, 313  
 Luppi, L., 312  
 Luxemburg, R., 147
- McCarthy, W. E. J., 33n, 116, 118, 304, 309  
 Maclouf, P., 313  
 MacPherson, C. B., 298n, 309  
 Magaud, J., 83, 309  
 Malles, P., 200-3, 207, 218, 309  
 Mallet, S., 36, 59, 61, 64, 70n, 76, 309
- Mandeville, B. de, 278  
 Manghi, 302  
 Mann, M., 62, 309  
 Mao Tse Tung, 242  
 Marie, M., 96, 310  
 Martin, R., 101-26 *passim*, 310  
 Marx, K., 35-9, 59, 67, 70n, 83, 129, 310  
 Massari, R., 33n, 310  
 May, J. D., 310  
 Maynard, G., 226, 227, 310  
 Mehl, D., 247-75 *passim*  
 Mellish, M., 316  
 Merli-Brandini, P., 140, 299, 310  
 Messelken, K., 179, 310  
 Metaillé, A. M., 247-75 *passim*  
 Michels, R., 102, 104, 122, 124, 310  
 Miliband, R., 307, 310, 316  
 Millhofer, P., 314  
 Mills, C. W., 61, 64, 310  
 Minkin, L., 179, 190, 310  
 Mitchell, D. J. B., 237, 310  
 Molitor, M., 79, 203  
 Momigliano, F., 310  
 Moran, M., 108, 310  
 Morawo, B., 183, 310  
 Mosler, V., 144, 310  
 Mouriaux, R., 299, 310  
 Müller-Jentsch, W., 33n, 110, 163, 180, 188, 301, 308, 310
- Negri, A., 213, 238, 310  
 Nhuan, N. D., 274n, 310  
 Nordhaus, W. D., 267, 311  
 Novella, 138
- O'Connor, J., 42, 44, 69n, 311  
 Oehlke, P., 300  
 Offe, C., 69n, 311  
 Olson, M., 293
- Paci, M., 40, 54, 69n, 77, 78, 80n, 311  
 Panella, A., 299  
 Panić, M., 289, 311  
 Panitch, L., 208, 311  
 Parkin, F., 60, 109, 311  
 Parkin, M., 283, 309  
 Paul, M., 246n  
 Pergola, E. della, 274n, 311  
 Perry, G., 227, 228, 230, 311  
 Phelps, E. S., 307, 311  
 Phelps Brown, E. H., 117, 113, 311  
 Pickvance, C., 274n, 311  
 Pietropado, E., 147, 311  
 Pillon, C., 189, 311  
 Pinot, F., 311  
 Piret, C., 33n, 311

- Pirkner, T., 311  
 Piore, M. J., 51, 304  
 Piva, 302  
 Pizzorno, A., 130, 151, 179, 182, 186, 190,  
     246n, 277-298 *passim*, 311, 312  
 Platt, J., 306  
 Poinard, M., 81, 312  
 Popitz, H., 64, 177, 312  
 Price, R. J., 57, 63, 300  
  
 Ragazzi, 39  
 Ramm, T., 201, 202, 207, 312  
 Raway, M., 96, 312  
 Rees, A., 290, 312  
 Regazzola, T., 310  
 Reichel, H., 106, 312  
 Reiffers, J. L., 80, 312  
 Regalia, I., 113, 142, 149, 312  
 Regini, M., 148, 205, 312  
 Reuther, W., 103, 139  
 Reynaud, J. D., 179, 191, 196n, 211, 212, 295,  
     296, 312, 313  
 Reyneri, E., 312  
 Richter, I., 126n, 313  
 Roberts, B. C., 63, 107, 305, 313  
 Roberts, G., 316  
 Roeber, J., 110, 126n, 313  
 Rolph, C. H., 122, 313  
 Romanis Braun, A., 313  
 Roosevelt, T., 292  
 Rosanvallon, P., 95, 313  
 Ross, A. M., 290, 308, 313  
 Roth, K. H., 173, 313  
 Runciman, W. G., 114, 313  
 Ryckeghem, W. van, 310  
  
 Salm, F., 137, 138, 146, 313  
 Salvati, M., 246n  
 Saurien, D., 134, 313  
 Saville, J., 307, 310, 316  
 Schiff, E., 214, 313  
 Schmidt, E., 132, 144, 308, 314  
 Schmidt, F., 202, 206, 314  
 Schmidt, H., 178  
 Schmidt, L., 303  
 Schmidt, R., 133, 314  
 Schmidt, U., 314  
 Schneider, D., 131, 314  
 Schneider, P., 161, 314  
 Schregle, J., 202, 218, 314  
 Schumann, M., 50, 51, 56, 65, 67, 174, 185,  
     308, 314  
 Sclavi, G., 139, 140, 147, 314  
 Sclavi, M., 314  
 Seidman, J., 104, 315  
 Shalev, M., 2, 5  
  
 Shister, J., 3, 314  
 Shorter, E., 286-90, 314  
 Siegel, A., 48, 49, 308  
 Simmel, G., 198, 314  
 Simpson, B., 314  
 Sisson, K., 114, 301  
 Sklair, L., 274n, 314  
 Smith, D. A., 284, 314  
 Soskice, D., 207, 221-46 *passim*, 297  
 Sperling, H. J., 110, 163, 202, 213, 238  
 Spitaels, G., 33n, 313, 315  
 Steele, R., 240, 304  
 Stokes, D., 190, 196n, 302  
 Strothmann, F., 145, 315  
 Sullerot, E., 73, 91, 315  
 Sutcliffe, B., 234, 235, 240, 306  
 Sykes, A. J. M., 120, 315  
  
 Tagliacozzo, D. L., 104, 315  
 Taylor, R., 121, 315  
 Teschner, E., 144, 310  
 Thompson, E. P., 83, 315  
 Thurley, K., 307  
 Tilley, C., 286-90, 315  
 Tocqueville, A. de, 182  
 Todisco, M., 302  
 Touraine, A., 33n, 36, 39, 49, 53, 59-62, 79,  
     315  
 Trentin, B., 154, 185, 315  
 Treu, T., 141, 143, 150, 159, 315  
 Trow, M., 102, 309  
 Turner, H. A., 7, 50-5, 283, 308, 316  
  
 Ulman, L., 234, 246n, 316  
  
 Verba, S., 300  
 Vidal, D., 304  
  
 Wagner, A., 317  
 Waline, P., 107, 316  
 Ward, R., 229, 231, 316  
 Warner, M., 103, 118, 304  
 Wawrzyn, L., 274n, 316  
 Webb, B., 277, 278  
 Webb, S., 278  
 Weber, M., 60  
 Wedderburn, K. W., 204, 299, 305, 312, 314,  
     316  
 Weekes, B., 208, 316  
 Weitbrecht, H., 181, 316  
 Weitz, P. R., 205, 210, 316  
 Werner, V. H., 137  
 Wesley, J., 83  
 Westergaard, J., 47, 49, 53, 54, 316  
 Wilkinson, F., 308  
 Willener, A., 60, 62, 316

Willey, R. J., 117, 124, 125, 214, 316  
Williams, P. M., 306  
Williamson, 103  
Wilson, D. F., 116, 316  
Windmuller, J. A., 219, 317  
Winkler, J., 198, 317

Witt, W., 137, 317  
Wohlfahrt, K., 303  
Wood, S. J., 317  
Zis, G., 229, 331, 316, 317  
Zoll, R., 127-60 *passim*, 184, 189, 191